DOCTOR WHO
NOVELLAS

TIME AND RELATIVE

KIM NEWMAN

Kim Newman

First published in England in 2001 by

Telos Publishing Ltd

61 Elgar Avenue, Tolworth, Surrey, KT5 9JP, England
www.telos.co.uk

ISBN: 1-903889-02-2 (standard hardback)

Time and Relative Š Kim Newman 2001.

Time

and Relative Foreword/Afterword Š Justin Richards 2001.

ISBN: 1-903889-03-0 (deluxe hardback)

Time and Relative Š Kim Newman 2001.

Time and

Relative Foreword/Afterword Š Justin Richards 2001.

Time and Relative Frontispiece Š

Bryan Talbot 2001.

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

DOCTOR WHO word mark, device mark and logo are trade marks of the British

Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence from BBC

Worldwide Limited.

Doctor Who logo ŠBBC 1996. Certain character names and characters within this book

appeared in the BBC television series

DOCTOR WHO. Licensed by BBC Worldwide

Limited.

Font design by Comicraft. Copyright Š1998 Active Images/Comicraft 430 Colorado

Avenue # 302, Santa Monica, Ca 90401

Fax (001) 310 451 9761/Tel (001) 310 458 9094

WEB: www.comicbookfonts.com; EMAIL: orders@comicbookfonts.com
Printed in England by

TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is

available from the British Library.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise, be lent,

resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in

which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being

imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

For Jerome

FOREWORD

In the Beginning

Justin Richards

Setting a story before the opening of the Doctor Who series opens up endless possibilities.

The fact that Time and Relative is set only just before the opening episode of 100,000 BC, that it utilises the same environment, is a testament to two things. One of them is the strength and persistence of the format established for Doctor Who right from the start. The other is Kim Newman's depth of perception rather than play against the success of the format he has chosen to use and expand it.

In doing so, Kim gives us a depth of character and background never afforded to Susan within the series. He gives us a new beginning using the benefit of hindsight to fill in gaps that have opened since the series started as well as a few that were always there. And he does it all within the context of a story rather than as throwaway novelties or gratuitous references.

Of course, we should expect no less. Kim Newman is one of Britain's foremost film and television historians he knows his Who. And he is also the novelist who brought us Anno Dracula maintaining the form and the fashion of the original Bram Stoker novel, but updating the theme and the content. If anyone is well-placed to make an informed reassessment of the opening history of Doctor Who, it is Kim Newman.

What better way to celebrate than to settle down on a cold winters night with a good Doctor Who story. Let the dark shadows in your mind lengthen, and the snow pile up on the window sill. Are you sitting comfortably? Well soon put a stop to that…

Justin Richards BBC Books Doctor Who Range Consultant August 2001

Time and Relative

Wednesday, March 27th, 1963

Hate, hate, hate! I hate Coal Hill School. I hate Year Four. I hate London. I hate pretending. I hate the cold.

Sometimes, I hate myself. Especially my whiny voice. When I hear it tape-recorded and played back, it doesnt sound like the me I hear in my head. My tiny little face has wrong-sized eyes and a funny chin. How could I have ever thought Id fit in? Its a wonder that they dont point in the street and shout invader from space! at me.

I dont hate him. I cant.

Without Grandfather, Id be alone. In the hateful universe.

Alone! A difficult word to write.

When I think about aloneness, my head

hurts. If I think near the fog-

patches in my mind, my thoughts skitter away. I try to picture something else, like five-dimensional equations or Peter OToole in Lawrence of Arabia. Its best not to go there.

Jean-Paul Sartre says we are all alone in the universe. I wonder if he means it literally. He could be One of Us. Grandfather and me (and I?) arent the only exiles (runaways).

Ouch! Do not think about that.

Hate is easier. It brings so much to mind. It cuts through the mindfog.

I hate the School Rules. By mediaeval law, children must write with

stupid old-fashioned pens! Classroom desks have inkwells stained blue with generations of use, and we all have to carry little bottles of Quink

Ink, which are forever popping open in your satchel, causing blue and black catastrophes. They have ballpoint pens in 1963 I checked at W H Smiths, and Im using a sensible biro to write this diary. Were supposed to use antiques for schoolwork because its beneficial for our developing hand. Fountain pens have more design faults than useful functions. My fingernails are permanently stained blue. My homework always gets marked down for blotchiness.

By the end of the day, I have ink-smears on my cheeks. John the Martian calls these Heidelberg duelling scars. Hes Official Class Oddity, so I pay no attention. And he is by no means free of Quinkstains.

I told Mr Grange, our form master, that pens will become obsolete. Everyone will mind-dictate into machines that write out what we say: correcting grammar, translating perfectly into another language or setting down what we meant rather than what we said. He called me Mother Shipton and the rest of 4G laughed.

But I am right. I know.

I must keep my mouth shut. People dont like being told whats coming next. It makes them uncomfortable. Ask Cassandra. She saw the future and was kicked to death for it.

I hate Double Geog on Friday mornings, and Games all afternoon (forms of gladiatorial combat called netball and hockey). I hate school liver.

I especially hate F.M.! Hes a dangerous thug, worse than the leather-jacket louts who go to the Pump. His personal mission is to make the lives of everyone else in our year wretched. He has a gang.

Weve been in 1963 for five months, I think. It seems like five months. But anywhen we stay, it always seems like five months. You might not think it possible to have spent five months in 1963 when its only March, but thatd only go to show how hidebound you are by the chronological system of ordering time.

Continuity, bah! Grandfather said yesterday or the day after. Doesnt exist, child. Except in the minds of the cretinously literal, like the singlehearts who clutter up this planet. Trying to sort it all out will only tie you up in useless knots forever. Get on with it and worry afterwards if you can be pinned to someone elses entirely arbitrary

idea of the day-to-day progression of events. Without contradictions, wed be entirely too easy to track down. Have you ever thought about that? Its important that we not be too consistent.

What Grandfather means is that hes tinkering with the Box, and that throws timekeeping out. Its one reason Ive started writing this diary. I can see that keeping the dates straight will be a major effort. Ill probably give it up.

Grandfather says I always want to give up when things get difficult, and then snorts about my generation. Hundreds of years ago, teenagers were supposedly angelic and contemplative, eagerly absorbing the wisdom of their elders. Hundreds of years ago and in an alternate universe, perhaps …

Its not as if he isnt a Rebel too.

That I have to go to School is my fault. It was my idea: I thought it important to fit in, struck with some Pinocchio notion of being a real live girl. Grandfather made it tiresomely clear that he thought I was being silly. Faking the records, documents and forms that got me enrolled at Coal Hill wasnt easy. Grandfather insists I stick by what he calls my immature whim so all that work wont go to waste. Little complicated tasks like forgery always get him enthusiastic. He loves fiddly problems that test his cleverness, and gets so caught up in details that he often forgets what the purpose of it all is.

Grandfather got hold of an Eleven Plus exam paper and made me sit it. I failed, by trying to argue with the stupid questions. Because of that, he put me in a Secondary Modem School rather than send me to a Grammar which means mixed boys and girls (socially healthy, I suppose, though there are drawbacks like F.M.), being called by your first name (unless youre being shouted at), no uniforms (though there is a prehistoric dress code no trousers for girls) and one everything-lumped-in Science course (rather than separate classes for Chemistry, Physics and Biology). Were all expected to leave at sixteen and get jobs.

Most of us cant wait.

I can be so stupid sometimes. School!!! What a pointless, miserable idea! Its Absurd (my Word of the Week). I dont see Grandfather going out and getting a job on the buses or as a solicitors clerk to go unnoticed among the indigenous population.

Perhaps he just wants me out of his long white hair in the daytimes.

Its not as if School could actually teach me anything.

Yesterday, in Science, we spent forty minutes establishing that magnesium burns. A revelation that rocks established beliefs about the nature of the universe to the core. I was tempted to strike one of Grandfathers everlasting matches, and see what poor plodding Mr Chesterton made of that.

I especially hate Mr Grange. Ghastly Grange. He is our form master, which means he has us in his total power first thing in the morning and afternoon as he calls out the register. Im in Form 4G; 4 for the year, G for Grange. He runs down the names and puts attendance ticks in the register, as if hoping each night or lunch-break will reveal heavy casualties so he can draw a thick black line through the name of the departed. He has hair growing out of his ears and teaches my least favourite lesson, Geography. Whenever I use an out-of-date place-name or get a capital city wrong, he chants a line from a horrible song, encouraging the others in class to sing along its Istanbul, not Constantinople!

From the first time I sat in his classroom (at the back), Ghastly Grange disliked me.

I dont know why and Im not especially interested, but I just put his back up.

Because I joined School after term started, he has me classed as a latecomer and Ive never managed to catch up. He objects to inkiness on principle. And he either doesnt like girls at all or likes them too much in a way that would Get Him Into Trouble.

Today, I forgot myself and Got Into Trouble.

Not like that! Ugh, gack and yuck, no! Never like that!

There was another thick fall of fresh snow last night, which settled over the frozen slush thats been around for weeks. In dinner break, we built a snowman in the playground. Gillian Roberts noticed a gaggle of Year One kids doing a bad job of snowman-construction and rounded up John the Martian and me to pitch in. Gillian sits next to me at the back of the class and is clever in ways School isnt set up to recognise. Give her Maths homework and she makes a hash of it, because to her logarithms are just nonsense numbers in books. And she always falls down in English because she has a mental block about spelling even the simplest words. However, if Gillian gets interested in a complicated, short-term project, she can organise the whole thing on

the spot, handing out work assignments to the most qualified, inspiring others to do their best.

When the snowman had risen taller than John, the tallest of us, Gillian hoisted up a Year One girl called Sadie Lederer, smallest of the group, and let her make the face.

She stuck on black pebbles, for a nose and eyes. After shed put Sadie down, Gillian fixed tiny clusters of twigs to the sides of the football-sized head.

Look, Forehead, Gillian said to me, he has hair growing out of his ears. Just like Ghastly Grange.

We all chortled. Even the littler kids, who hadnt yet been exposed to Mr Grange.

The name stayed in my head after the bell went. When the afternoon register was called, I said here, Ghastly instead of here, Mr Grange. Calamitous mistake! Form 4G laughed in the fakey way children do when theyre mocking rather than amused. Mr Grange ghastly Mr Ghastly gave me Lines.

I have to write I will show respect at all times for the teachers of Coal Hill Secondary Modern School a hundred and fifty times.

Im writing this to put off doing the lines.

I had better get on with it.

Later

Grandfather looked in while I was doing the Lines.

He saw the half-covered paper and harrumphed.

Cant see the point of that homework, Susan, he said. Surely they dont use by-rote subliminal commands to enforce mental discipline in this day and age? Its brainwashing, thats what it is. And very dangerous. Your mind is like a fine watch.

It shouldnt have sand poured into it.

I told him it wasnt homework, but punishment.

Ah, thats different. Carry on, convict.

Grandfather never stands up for me. He has no idea what its like in School. He said hed go to the parents evening last month, but forgot.

Thats a black mark against me. He forgets a lot of things.

Hes in a completely different world. I really mean that.

I dont forget things, but sometimes I cant remember.

There are white gaps in my head. When my train of thought leads into one of the fog-patches, pain flares up behind my forehead as if Id eaten ice cream too fast. If my mind is a library, theres a roped off grown-up section where I cant go. I know day-to-day things like when we need to get a pinta from the shops or that I should take plimsolls in on Tuesday and Thursday for P.E., but beyond that the fog gets thicker.

Some questions are dangerous to ask. Even of yourself.

Like where do we come from?

A burst of pain behind my eyes stopped me from thinking dangerously, and I got back to the Lines. When my mind strayed momentarily, I lost count. In the end, I did a hundred and fifty-three lines. I scissored the extras off the last sheet of paper.

Ghastly is so ghastly hed probably add extra punishment for exceeding orders. The point of Lines is to instil mindless obedience. Youre not supposed to ask questions.

And how did Constantinople get the works?

Thats nobodys business but the Turks!

Last week, Gillian slammed her desktop up and down in a rage and it came off at the hinges. Ghastly gave her the Strap, three times across the palm of the hand in front of the whole class. It didnt matter that she was ill-treating the desk because she was angry with F.M. for jabbing her b*m with his protractor. She was taking it out on something she couldnt hurt because she was really, sincerely trying not to get in any more trouble for fighting. As it turned out, she should have given F.M. a black eye shed have had the satisfaction of getting the protractor-stabber back and shed have been punished less severely. According to the rules, attacking School Property is worse than anything you do to another pupil. When F.M. thumped Little Titch Critchley and broke his glasses, he only got Lines.

I cant write any more. My hand is wrung out.

I will show respect at all times for the teachers of Coal Hill Secondary Modem School.

I will show respect. I will hide my True Feelings.

Thursday, March 28th, 1963

Morning Assembly. Hymns murdered by the whole School to the piano poundings of Mrs Bellwether, the Music Teacher: He Who Would Valiant Be, which is about being a Pilgrim (and Means Something Secret to me), and There Is a Green Hill Far Away, Without a City Wall, which is about Easter, which is coming up fast (in this context, without means outside). A Bible reading from Leslie Culver, a Year Five R.E. swot who stammers. Cold weather additions to the School Rules from the Headmaster, Basil James Carker (M.A., Oxon). No running, no snowballs, no skating, no whistling. No exceptions and no complaining.

Jawohl, mein Führer, mumbled Gibson from Year Five.

After Assembly, I handed in my Lines and got a nod of acknowledgement from Mr Grange.

Doing a punishment should wipe the original offence from everyones minds so you get treated normally again. There are ways of making everyone (even you) forget what youve done and why you did it, but it doesnt work like that on Earth. Mr Grange knows what the children call him, but has picked on me to be blamed for it. Children nicknamed him Ghastly years ago, long before I ever came to School. You can get Lines for whistling Only the Lonely within earshot because an earlier 4G made up a lyric about him that went Lastly the Ghastly. He looks at me and sees all the children down through the aeons who didnt show respect.

Someone should teach him that respect has to be earned.

Later

The cold.

I dont understand it.

London is in a relatively temperate climatic zone. The United Kingdom is characterised by short, mild winters.

Spring should have sprung, but theres no sign of a thaw. Not a single snowdrop.

Snow has been on the ground for months, since well before Christmas, thick and settled, with new falls most nights. In streets and playgrounds, the white carpet has been mashed to slush and frozen, then snowed on again, slushed and frozen again, over and over. Dangerous layers of ragged ice lie beneath the dusting of soft, white snow.

The football pitch is ploughed clear so the boys can troop out to battle on Friday afternoons. The grassless earth is as hard as playground asphalt and the boys crawl scraped and bleeding to the showers, bare legs and arms blue. Because the boiler is acting up, the showers last week were cold and there was very nearly a mutiny.

Clear, sharp, thick stalactites hang from all the ridges of the buildings, forming draperies and traceries. Children melt messages into the ice with matchflame-heated pen-nibs: initials (never mine) in hearts, Long Live the Hotspurs, Girls Beware

Dirty Gertie at Large!. The caretaker goes into the loos first thing in the morning and has to smash the ice in the toilet-bowls. The heating, dependent on a pre-war furnace and boiler, is often on the blink. Heavy iron radiators in all the classrooms make snapping, fizzing and drumming sounds all day but dont give out proper warmth.

Children cluster close and press themselves against the thick-painted metal, which doesnt help.

In Foremans Yard, snow drifts higher than my shoulders. A clear path leads to the Box, with banks that threaten to collapse every day. If anyone ever did want to buy any of the scrap in the Yard (no-one has ever asked), theyd have to wait until glaciation receded.

Early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when theres no sun, you can breathe in the cold and feel microscopic ice-chips in your nose, windpipe and lungs. Tears freeze like sleep-sand. You mustnt touch the iron railings with bare fingers, because of black ice. Supposedly, youd leave skin behind. Its a fearful temptation to try just a fingertip, to see if what they say is true.

Every class has two or three children with splints. Gillian and John the Martian are plotting to give F.M. an undetectable shove one break-time, hoping to slow him down with a broken bone or three.

Have I written about Francis Minto? I hate him!

John the Martian showed me a book he likes, called How to Be Topp, written by Geoffrey Williams with pictures by Ronald Searle. In the book, there is a picture captioned every skool hav a resident buly who is fat. Ronald Searle must know F.M., for the picture of the resident buly is Francis to the life. I expect he also knows Gillian, because he spells just like her.

At morning break, F.M. assaulted our snowman.

Gillian was putting an old flat cap and a scarf on the snowmans football-shaped head when Francis turned up with his gang of smaller boys. He sneered at us for being infants and loonies, then took a cricket bat from his gym bag and swatted off the snowmans head. Sadie cried, which made Francis back down before a teacher came over to ask what the matter was. When Miss Wright asked, John told her the Year One girl had slipped on an ice-patch. No matter how much we might loathe F.M., none of us wants to get a reputation for snitching. Miss Wright asked Francis what he was doing with a cricket bat out of season, but didnt pursue that line of questioning. The teachers all know what

F.M. is like, but he sucks up to them so doesnt often get into trouble. If there were any justice, hed get a million Lines a week, plus the Strap every day and the Cane in front of the whole School at Thursday Assembly.

At lunch, Gillian and I made the snowman whole again. He looks more like Ghastly than ever.

Later

The heating went off. We had to sit in class with coats, scarves, mittens and caps on. When anyone talked, their breath frosted. In the Science Lab, Mr Chesterton had all the Bunsen burners going full blast. It didnt help.

It was better outside, in dinner break. The skies were clear and the sun bright, though with a cold light. All day, the ice melts slowly; then, at nightfall, it freezes again, in strange sculpture shapes.

Dad tells me its the bloody Russians, said John the Martian.

He doesnt usually speak to girls, except Gillian. But we were working on the snowman. I added scraps of black bark to the face to make a smile, while Gillian and John packed the body with fresh snow. The Head has decreed that a School snowman is a good idea, like a mascot, so a teacher is on guard against Franciss gang now. Our work is likely to stand until spring.

If there ever is a spring.

Atom missiles are hot, said Gillian. Thats daft.

Its not missiles, Dad says. Its a freezing ray, pointed at England. Its called the Novosibirsk Project and weve been onto it for quite some time, thanks to that low-temperature physicist who defected.

You dont half talk rubbish, Martian, said Gillian.

No its serious, said John, intent. There was a Panorama on it. There really is a Novosibirsk Project. Even the Kremlin admits it now. They say its about climate control, making the steppes into arable land. If you hadnt bunked off Geog, youd know about it.

So why is it cold here? I asked. Are they taking Englands spring for Siberia and unloading their winter on us?

Something like that. Kruschev is trying it on again with Kennedy. He needs to show hes a strong hand or else hell be overthrown by a coup detat. The Generals didnt like him backing down over Cuba. Coups detat is what you get when the army takes over. They dont happen here, though Dad says oned be a good idea since the mob in parliament cant tie their own shoelaces without calling out the troops.

Johns father is in the army. To hear John tell it, Captain Brent is in on all the secrets they keep from the Prime Minister. Hes put John in the R.O.T.C. (which stands for Royal Officer Training Corps, I think), which means he has to stay behind after School on Mondays and Wednesdays. He does square-bashing and polishes things, so that if he ever goes in the army hell be an officer. I get the impression that John doesnt do well under military discipline. His mind doesnt work that way, and his feet arent arranged for close-order drill. He would design the bombs, not drop them.

How could the Russians point a freezing ray at England? I asked John. The Earth curves, so if they pointed a ray it would go straight up and

out into space. A ray isnt like a missile, which would describe a parabola.

John looked at me funny (funnily?).

From Sputnik, Forehead, he said, superior and certain. Sputnik is just a small ball, I said, describing its size with my hands. A mirrored ball, like in the Palais Dance Hall. The Russkis can shine a ray off it, reflect it down on us. I had to admit that was possible, but unlikely. I could see John was impressed that I knew the size of Sputnik. Pay attention to the face, Martian, said Gillian, looking at me strangely.

I shouldnt have said anything, as usual. Gillian isnt like Ghastly or most of the children. She genuinely listens to what people say, then thinks about what it means.

Mostly, she thinks about how much of a threat people are to her. John is harmless, obviously.

Now, she is wondering if Im not.

Later

Gillian started calling John the Martian. She says he looks like the Mekon, Dan Dares enemy in The Eagle, which annoys John because the Mekon (apparently) is Venusian. When Gillian says same difference, John delivers an illustrated lecture about the Solar System and the respective places of Venus, the Earth and Mars.

Gillian thought Pluto was a cartoon dog and laughs out loud whenever Uranus is mentioned. John gets frustrated when Gillian pretends to be stupid to cover up for her ignorance. Its not her fault that shes grown up in a house without books or proper newspapers, where the telly is always tuned to the channel with adverts.

Gillian calls me Forehead. When she first did it, I went home and examined my face in a mirror for hours, combing my fringe different ways. Finally, I realised Gillian was making a joke about my name not my face. Theres nothing unusual about my forehead.

I live under the name Foreman like Winnie-the-Pooh lives under the name Sanders. Its written up on the gates of the junkyard. I dont know where it comes from, and I only started using it because Grandfather needed two names to put on the forged documents.

If I think about it, its funny that the children say that John is from outer space.

He wears thick specs, which he tampers with using transparent pink Sellotape to make them sunglasses (or anti-snowglare glasses, though theyre also the proverbial rose-coloured spectacles) or wiring two thin torches to the arms so he can see in the dark. In every subject, hes either second from top or second from bottom.

Unlike me.

Im top in Maths and Science and bottom in everything else, though I was top in one History test when the question was about Renaissance Italy. Im hopeless at Geog I always forget what countries and capital cities are calling themselves this year (even old New York was once New Amsterdam … why they changed it, I cant say …

people just liked it better that way). Mademoiselle (Madame Weasel) Quelou says my French sounds like it comes out of the middle ages (I get Latin mixed up with it). I am only picked for netball when Gillian is captain. My English is all over the show, as you, dear diary, must have noticed. I have to concentrate hard when doing essays not to lapse into Fonetik Speling, which is a lot like Ronald Searle Meets Gillian. Somehow, writing this is different. Maybe because Im doing this by choice not because I have to.

I was sent to the Head for saying that Religious Education is just History with more blatant fibs. Im much better on the Gods that came from Outer Space than the ones people made up so they would feel better. Mr Carker consulted the list of permissible punishments in the School Rules, as if hoping to find public burning of heretics still on the books.

When Grandfather asks me how Im getting on in School, I lie.

Friday, March 29th, 1963

A morning of eternal torment. Double Geography. Ghastly made us draw diagrams of a barkhan, the distinctive type of crescent-shaped Saharan sand dune I recognise from Lawrence of Arabia. All with the prospect of an afternoon of Games to make things worse.

But a miracle came about: Lo, Games was called off. The showers couldnt be used because of the frozen pipes.

Gillian says parents have complained about the cuts and scrapes. Not her parents, though. She always has cuts and scrapes. She lives with just her Dad, because her Mum took off when she was little.

The whole of Year Four was put in the Assembly Hall and given board games. Only the most suicidal soccer players among the boys complained. Wendy Coburn asked Mr Chesterton if we could play records on her Dansette, and he said it would be all right and that we could even dance to keep warm. He would be only too happy to keep an eye on us and had to be persuaded not to join in.

Some of the girls danced to Susan Maughan (Bobbys Girl), Neil Sedaka (Breaking Up is Hard to Do) and Chris Waites and the Carrollers (Christmas Caroline), but I played Snakes & Ladders. Up the ladders, down the snakes comforting, meaningless movement.

Wendy Coburn put on Love Me Do.

You cant call that din music, said John the Martian, who only likes classical.

Its just a bunch of yobs making a noise.

Youre not with-it, Martian, said Gillian, teasing.

This is the best and most important 45 single of the last five years, I said. For the rest of your life, youll remember that you were there when the Beatles started.

Wendy and her clique were dancing dreamily. Even without the benefit of the long view, it was obvious that The Beatles were special. Poor Chris Waites wasnt even playing in the same division.

It isnt exactly Mozart, John snorted.

Grandfather says Mozart was a bad-mannered show-off with a silly hairstyle, I said, who made a racket just to get attention.

Grandfather has longer hair than the Fab Four, I should mention.

Its what grown-ups say about pop groups we like, I carried on. Its always been like that. Its because adults are threatened. When music

changes, it means that were taking over. The young.

John was looking at me oddly. Where did that come from, Forehead? Deep thoughts.

And they call me the Martian? I must be more careful.

Later

The door of the Box was iced over when I got back to Totters Lane. Before I could get inside for my tea, I had to use a scraper from the junkyard to chip it free.

Grandfather didnt notice.

At the moment, hes interested in the cold.

Johns

Dad says its the Russians, I told him.

Hardly likely, child.

He says the

Russkis only ever win wars when they have the snow on their side. Dont take that too literally. Even in the Box, its cold. And that shouldnt be possible. Snow, Susan, isnt on anybodys side.

Saturday, March 30th, 1963

No School today. And I did my homework yesterday evening.

Grandfather is busy.

When he thinks about the cold, he becomes cold.

Sometimes, hes just normally grumpy and crotchety, which is what you expect from grown-ups throughout the universe.

But now hes different.

Its as if hes an organic machine, doing what he was designed to do. Calculating and tabulating but not connecting, not caring, not feeling.

Even being irritated is feeling something.

This is standing outside a window, looking in, watching a child being beaten but not smashing through to do anything. Finding it interesting, but having no reason to change it, as if the whole universe were a big painting in a gallery, to be admired for its technique but which we should never think to add a brushstroke to, not even to repair damage or improve on a shoddy bit of work.

Where we come from, all people are like that. I worry that if the fog ever clears, Ill find that Im like that too.

Grandfather cant be like that at bottom, or we wouldnt be here.

We wouldnt have run away.

I have a headache, a bad one. I must stop thinking about this.

Later

I went out, wrapped up warm and being careful on the iced pavements. Safety notices are up everywhere.

The British government likes nothing better than telling people what to do for their own good. And the British people like to grumble, ignore the Men from the Ministry and make do with cups of tea.

Since were here, I suppose Grandfather and I are honorarily British. We both like tea, and I suppose we grumble and know better than officials too.

It could have been a lot worse. We could be honorary Americans.I expect wed be noisier, smile more and have guns.

The snow-cleaning crews have stopped coming down Totters Lane. They have to concentrate on the High Street and the arterial roads, which mean streets where people only live have to get by as best they can. A few humps in the Lane show where parked cars are buried, awaiting archaeologists from a future society. Mrs Faulke at Number 79 stubbornly clears off her front step and a path to the kerb every morning.

She told me she was writing to the council to complain.

The drifts in the gutters and on the pavements are several feet thick. Dogs and cats are frozen solid under some of them, probably not in

suspended animation.

The Star, News and Standard each give different figures, but people have died. Every day, theres a story about a pensioner expiring in a fridge-like flat, or a lost child turning up white and lifeless. There is skating on the Serpentine, but a student rag crew has been banned from doing a charity walk on the Thames. Current still runs under the floes, and the ice in the middle of the river is dangerously thin.

Our School snowman isnt the only one. Parks and allotments are full of the fellows.

Some kids have dressed up their creations like bishops or bowler-hatted gents and ask passers-by for pennies, like for Guy Fawkes Night. At the bus stop, children have shaped a drift into a row of fat folk waiting for now-rare buses.

The High Street is swept and salted. It was busy today. A lot of shops close most of the week, because of the quiet crisis, but open on Saturday morning. That means people have to get all their things at once.

The Pump, the pub on the corner, has newly-raised prices for brandies and spirits chalked up outside. In opening hours, there are always motorbikes parked outside The Pump, with lads in black leather jackets comparing the noises they can get out of their machines and jeering at anyone who complains about the racket. They call themselves the Ton-Up Boys. Apparently, you cant get into the gang unless youve driven your bike at over a hundred miles an hour (the Ton) and lived to tell the tale. Now, the motorcyclists all wrap their bikes up in canvas shrouds and make even more noise getting them started because the points ice over. Im always sure to cross the road so as not to walk past the pub when the Ton-Up Boys are out and about. They say horrid things to any girls in sight, even those as tiny and unnoticeable as me.

I went to the shops for Grandfather, with a list. There are shortages, and I couldnt get everything. Eggs, bread and tea are difficult. In the queues, women were talking about rationing coming back. Milk is impossible to find. The float stopped coming round two weeks ago. Bottles left on doorsteps froze and the pintas popped top-bursting white fingers. A lot of shops have policemen supervising the queues, with thick capes and helmets. Some people get shirty. Truncheon-prods are not unknown.

I spent my pocket money (6d) on chocolate, but it was frozen and I hurt my teeth eating it.

Hello, Forehead, called a voice.

It was John the Martian, sitting in the passenger seat of a jeep. At weekends, he wears a woolly army jumper instead of a blazer. Today, he wore a black balaclava that bulged out at the sides over his glasses-arms.

The balaclava didnt cover enough of his face to conceal scarlet blushes.

Hello, John, I said. Since the business with Ghastly, Im careful not to use nicknames when talking to people. (I dont know how Gillian gets away with it.) I was puzzled about the blushes. Then I realised John doesnt naturally talk to girls. Its only when Gillian is around that it seems the done thing. Out of School, he isnt sure if he should admit I exist.

Im here with Dad, said John.

Soldiers were in the High Street, setting up an inspection point. Captain Brent, Johns father, was bossing the soldiers about, doing his best to be polite to women in queues who asked him questions. He was better at the bossiness than the politeness.

Were taking over from the civilian authorities for the duration of the Emergency,

said John

What Emergency?

The cold. Its an Attack. Anyone can tell that this isnt natural. Its being done to us. Itll be official, soon.

Johns father came back to the jeep. He had a younger soldier with him, his driver.

Whos your little friend, Johnno?

Uh, Fore …

Susan Foreman, I said.

Same school as Johnno?

I admitted it.

Good-oh. Keep out of trouble.

When they drove off, veering around snowy lumps in the road, John looked back at me.

I think he likes me.

Later

I like Peter OToole and John Lennon and Patrick McGoohan. I love Lawrence of Arabia and the Beatles and Danger Man.

I dont like Albert Finney, except I dont like him in a special way that might mean I like him more than any others I mention.

Because it had an X-certificate, Gillian and I had to dress up like Year Six girls, with high-heels and make-up and scarves, to get into Saturday Night and Sunday Morning at the Rialto. We sat in the back stalls and two lads tried to chat us up, but they were horrible and Gillian saw them off. The big scandal was that we saw Mr Chesterton and Miss Wright from School in the audience, and had to hide because they might give our ages away.

I keep thinking about Albert Finney. Or maybe Arthur Seaton, the man he plays in the film which comes from a book by Alan Sillitoe that I havent finished yet. Ghastly confiscated the paperback because I

was reading it when I should have been studying Swiss crop-rotation. When he dropped the rat on the factory conveyor-belt or broke windows by throwing stones, I could see that he was wrong and right at the same time.

I think I like rebels, being at least an honorary one myself.

I dont like Cliff Richard and Im quite sure about that. Ugh! As far as Im concerned, its no surprise that hes likely to stay a bachelor boy.

Of course, these arent people I know personally. Ive only seen and heard them in films and magazines or on television and the wireless.

I dont know them. (Like I know John and Gillian and teachers and Grandfather.) At my apparent age, in some earthly cultures, Id be married and have children. Even here and now in England (with my forged birth certificate), I could be married a year and a half from now though that seems hardly likely. Gillian says Year Five girls who leave School to get married usually have a bun in the oven.

John likes me. Do I like John?

Thats a question I dont feel like answering here.

Later

After John left with his Dad, I hung about the High Street for a while. I have a sort of weekend job on Saturday afternoons, looking after Malcolm, with a lavish take-home wage of five shillings. Gillian calls Malcolm my boyfriend, but hes six years old and babyish even for his age. His Mum works in the newsagents and his Dads on the buses. Theyre from Trinidad and were complaining about the climate even before it got cold. Malcolm likes going to the pictures, especially cowboy films (which are boring) and cartoons (which make more sense). Sometimes, I take him to the zoo or a museum, but mostly I stay in his parents flat with him, playing games and telling stories.

Malcolm likes being told stories. Ive told him that Im a runaway princess from outer space. He pretends to believe me. Or maybe hes not pretending. When Im talking with him, I can tell him things Im not supposed to tell anyone else. My head doesnt hurt. Its as if Malcolm doesnt count.

Children are different.

Malcolm has toy robots and spaceships and is fascinated by whats up

there, beyond the sky.

His favourite toy is a gonk. Theyre a craze at the moment: stuffed Humpty Dumpty-like things, huge eggheads with exaggerated faces and tiny limbs. His is a cowboy with a black moustache, a tiny stetson and

holsters around its jowls.

Cowboy Gonk goes everywhere with Malcolm.

Today, I took Malcolm mummified in layers of coat, scarves, boots and mittens

from his Mum at the newsagent. He insisted we watch the soldiers, though they werent doing anything that interesting.

Keep your golliwog out of the way, miss, said a soldier, a private.

That was nasty. Malcolm may be only six, but he went quiet when he heard the soldier, holding Cowboy Gonk tighter, eyes on the pavement. And we werent in anybodys way. Little blighter ought to go back where e came from, said the squaddie. If thats what people think about Malcolm, who was born in Britain, imagine how theyd feel if they knew where I came from!

The soldier glared at Malcolm.

I think you should go back to where you come from, I said.

And wheres that?

Primordial ooze, from the look of you.

Dont cheek me, he said.

Whats all this? asked a sergeant. Malingering again, Mooney? If we didnt have so many on the sicklist, youd be up on a charge p.d.q.

He called my friend a golliwog, sir, I said.

It wasnt like snitching in School. It was something that ought to be known.

The sergeant looked at Malcolm and smiled.

You have to admit theres a resemblance. Now clear off out of it and

let us get on with our business, theres a good little bint.

My cheeks burned. Tears pricked.

Come on, Malcolm, I said, taking his hand. Lets leave these primitive lifeforms to evolve.

That made him laugh a little, though he didnt understand.

Why do people here think small variations in skin-tone are important? Or the way people think? Or where theyre from?

When the soldiers were rude to Malcolm, I wanted to open my mouth and breath freezing death, crystallising them into breakable statues. I cant actually do that, but I am different.

If I put my mind to it, there are things I can do.

I think I can, anyway.

But I dont. I can tell Malcolm as much as I know, but only because he thinks Im telling him stories. Malcolm is the best they have here. I must try to think of that. Theres F.M. and Ghastly Grange and Double Geog, but theres also Malcolm. When I tell him about other planets, his eyes expand with wonder. Those are his favourite stories.

Malcolm was quiet all afternoon. When I dropped him off at his flat, his Mum saw at once how he was but didnt ask why. Im sure she can make a pretty good guess. If I were from here, Id be ashamed. But Im not, so Im only angry.

Later

Saturday night, as in and Sunday morning. Grandfather lets me come and go as I please. John, who receives house orders from his father every morning at breakfast and has to account for every minute of every day, is envious of the freedom but it isnt always a blessing. I sometimes worry that while Im out of sight, Grandfather will forget who I am. He could easily take the Box away and strand me here. Then Id probably have to grow up, get a job, get married and have children. Not exactly an exciting prospect. Maybe Id be better off as a beat girl, making up poetry in an Old Compton Street coffee bar, zipping in and out of traffic on a Lambretta and wearing only black clothes. Thanks to Vidal Sassoon, Ive got the hairstyle for it.

Tonight, I met up with Gillian. We were going to the pictures.

Its awkward. Gillian cant come to Foremans Yard (for obvious reasons) and she doesnt want me going round her flat (for reasons I can guess but wont go into). We have to find somewhere with a Ladies, so we can change.

At the foot of Coal Hill, theres a Youth Club attached to the church, where only the weediest Year Three kids would consider going. Mrs Haigh, the Vicars wife, doesnt approve of music with a beat, which allegedly encourages licentious dancing, and so plays only light religious records. Michael, Row the Boat Ashore, Hallelujah, et cetera. The vicar serves the captive youth ginger beer, which he makes himself from Earthling organisms that fester in jars, which often detonate spectacularly.

Normally, Gillian and I wouldnt be caught dead there, but the club has a good-sized loo with proper mirrors.

Theres not much I can do to appear older except wrap a scarf around my head, totter on heels, and put on a long coat. Gillian pads her bra with handkerchiefs and lets out her ponytail into this brilliant mane. She also has a pleated green skirt that shows her knees and a neckscarf that matches.

We worked a long time, doing each others faces with war paint. I wound up with scarlet lipstick and heavy blue eyeshadow and looked like a tribal princess prepared for sacrifice to the volcano gods. Gillian has a much better face than me: a little eyebrow pencil and a dab of lipstick and voila! a double for Shirley Anne Field.

Cool, man, I said, examining her beat style. Straight from the fridge.

Dont talk to me about fridges, Forehead. Not in this weather. Two minutes outside and I cant feel my knees.

Then we got out of the Youth Club, avoiding Mr Haigh and his pingpong table. We passed the Vicars wife on the way out, and she gave us a Look. When we were well away from the club, we both had the giggles.

Did you see that? I said.

The poor woman thinks were on the Road to Wrack and Ruin.

Well, arent we?

Not half!

By the time we got to the Rialto The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, with Tom Courtenay the picture had started. Neither of us was that interested in seeing it anyway. In the framed photographs outside, Tom Courtenay looked a bit too much like John the Martian and we saw enough of him at School not to need a feature-length reminder.

So, there we were, all dolled up and nowhere to go.

Ive got an idea, said Gillian. We can obviously pass for over eighteen, so lets go to The Pump. I hear they have a really super jukebox. Its near where you live, isnt it?

I didnt want to seem timid, so I agreed.

I thought wed never be allowed in, because pubs are stricter than the Rialto about how old you are. So there wouldnt be any harm in it.

As we got near The Pump, Gillian told me to walk older.

How do you do that? I asked.

She demonstrated: sticking her padded chest out, pointing her chin up and adding inches to her height by keeping her legs straight and stretching her spine. I tried it, but it wasnt comfortable and got the giggles again.

Gillian was a bit annoyed, but had to giggle too.

Something funny, girls?

The boy who asked was outside The Pump, tying the covers on a motorcycle. He wore a black leather jacket and gauntlets. A checkered Rupert scarf flopped out from under his crash helmet.

Only the way you look, Mr Spaceman, said Gillian.

I was tense inside. It wasnt sensible to cheek one of the Ton-Up Boys.

He took his helmet off and wiggled his eyebrows.

Take me to your, leader, he said. Ive come to Earth to harvest your girls. The women of our planet are used up, and were searching for volunteers to replace them.

Good luck, chummie, said Gillian.

The names Zack, not Mr Spaceman, not chummie.

Izzat so?

You girls have names?

Might do, said Gillian.

For instance … ?

Zack wasnt alone. He had a group of friends with him, lounging about outside the pub like F.M.s gang, all in motorcycle gear. The Ton-Up Boys. There were even a couple of sharp-faced girls, in big bloke-sized jackets and spray-on jeans, ponytails tied back with pink gauze.

Zack put his helmet on his bike and took a flick-knife out of his pocket.

Theyre banned in School, but some older boys carry them anyway. With a smile, Zack pressed the stud and the blade shot out only it wasnt a knife, but a comb. His dark blond hair was pressed out of shape by the helmet, and he began to sculpt a wave into it.

Enough grease on that to fry bacon, said Gillian.

I thought she was risking death or worse, especially when some of Zacks Boys laughed. But he just smiled, finished with his hair and put his comb away.

How gorgeous is that, love? he asked.

On a scale of one to ten, about thirty below.

Like the weather, then. You look like you could both do with a warm-up. How would you like double brandies?

I had a precognitive vision of being very sick later.

Are you buying, Flash? asked Gillian.

Might be, he said.

Dont believe a word Zack says, said one of his friends, who had what seemed like a tire-mark down one cheek. Hes always skint by Saturday night. Blows his whole wage packet on Fridays boozing.

Thats not true. I save a ten-bob-note for emergencies, and the chilling

of these angels is clearly an emergency.

Sum-Mooth, chanted several of the lads.

Dont pay any attention, said Zack. Theyre jealous of my winning ways.

You dont half fancy yourself, dont you? said Gillian.

If I do, then I have to go to the back of a very long queue. Behind you two, for a start.

He had a big smile, but crooked front teeth.

Dream on, Flash.

Cant blame a fella for trying. What school do you go to?

Coal Hill, I said, without thinking.

The lads laughed, and Gillian gave me a dangerous look.

Jailbait, said Zack. Thought as much. Good night, ladies. See you around … in a couple of years.

Zack and his friends trooped into the Pump, leaving us standing outside in the cold.

Gillian gave up standing tall and glared electric fury at me. Im sorry, I said. I didnt think. When angry, Gillians older disguise slipped. She seemed like an infant on the verge of a tantrum, face purplish in the dark. What do you look like, Forehead? she said, putting a thumb on my lips and smearing. A sad clown.

Im sorry, I said again, hearing myself whine.

Gillian walked off without saying anything else.

I assume that this is the end of my short career as a beat girl.

Later

Trudging from The Pump down Totters Lane to Foremans Yard, I was miserable. Grown-up shoes werent suitable for the iced-over pavement, which made it hard to keep a balance. The sound of music (something rocking) and conviviality from the pub just emphasised how shut out I was. Now, I was even shut out from Gillians little gang

of weirdoes. I knew shed make John side with her. I had become the outsiders outsider.

I heard a whispering, crackling sound unlike a human voice. It made me cold inside. It took a few moments for me to realise I was afraid. Usually, I get annoyed, not scared. There was no one out on the street. Only a few lights on behind curtains.

The whispering again.

I looked around. Several of the streetlamps were dark.

Icicle stalactites hung from them. I wondered if what Id heard was the wind in the icicles.

Im sensitive. I admit it.

Sometimes, I can feel things others cant.

I knew I wasnt alone on the street. And the other presence wasnt a person. Not being a proper person myself, I can recognise things with intelligence that arent human.

I was being watched. By eyes in the ice.

I tried to walk faster, but slipped, losing a shoe. My stockinged foot touched frozen pavement and a cold shock shot up my leg. I wobbled, but didnt fall over.

My worst fear: the Truant Officer has come to take us Home!

I was in a panic, for Grandfather. I thought I knew what the Masters would do to him.

After our trial, I wouldnt be allowed to remember him or he me. It would be as if we werent related. No, it would be more than that: we wouldnt be related. The whole of time and space would shift, so that we both still had lives, but separate and different, lived by the Rules.

The gates of Foremans Yard were open. The blue light shone on the top of the Box.

My panic passed. I knew we hadnt been found.

But there was still a new presence in Totters Lane. An intellect vast,

cold and …

unsympathetic?

I picked up my shoe and hobbled into the junkyard.

Sunday, March 31st, 1963

I stayed home, in my room.

Home is the Box.

Its not just a Box. Its also a Ship. It might well be a Ship inside a Box. The thing is that the Inside is an Outside. Its outside everything.

You wouldnt understand. I can set down the Physics, filling in the rest of this diary with diagrams, but you still wouldnt understand.

Trust me.

Of course, youre probably me. In the future, grown-up, reading back on what you were like when you were my age. Will the white fog have lifted?

Grandfather still has missing parts in his mind and memory. Whenever people ask his name, he gets out of saying it. Lately, he gets out of being in situations where people might ask his name.

I should know Grandfathers name, but I dont.

Its as if he had a name once but it was taken away, not just from him but from everyone.

I used to think I was unique.

But Grandfather is like me. And so is Gillian when anyone asks about her cuts and bruises, I sense her getting something like the mindache I have when I think too near to the fog.

After last night, I dont think Gillian is my friend any more. She went home angry. I was being a complete child, speaking without thinking. What I did wrong actually mattered. Though she was giving Zack a hard time, cheeking him back, I could tell Gillian was testing him,

throwing remarks to see how they bounced. I think shed like to be a Ton-Up Girl when she leaves School. Not the sort that sits on a pillion or flutters a scarf to start a race, but the sort with a motorcycle of her own or at least one of those nippy little Italian scooters who keeps up with the Boys.

It took ages to take off that sad clown make-up. Gillian was right about that: I did look stupid. What could I have been thinking?

I accept that there are things missing inside my head.

Memories are like newspapers and magazines. You cant keep them all, but you can cut out the articles and pictures to put in a scrapbook. Only its not your choice. Its like someone else does the cutting and pasting. They put in things youd rather leave for the dustmen and throw away things that would have been useful or your favourites.

When I read this, will I know the answers?

Or will I need this to remind me of the questions Ive forgotten?

Thinking about Grandfather, Im sometimes worried terrified that the fog-patches get bigger as we grow up.

Not for people in general, but for people like Grandfather and me. If we count as people.

There are times when Grandfather doesnt know me or himself. He arrives at the end of a sentence having forgotten how he began it, and then gets flustered. He tries to cover his lapses with bad temper, but I see how they hurt him. I can feel his frustration and pain.

Then again, there are times when Grandfather isnt a person.

Living in a Box, rarely stepping outside, looking at screens and dials. Its not what people are supposed to do. I dont think its what Grandfather wants, but his fog-patches are larger than mine and are growing.

(Sometimes, I can feel inside Grandfathers head. It doesnt work with anyone else.

The sad thing is that its easiest when the least is there, when hes less like himself. Then I get frightened. Theres a black void inside the white fog and thats dangerous. Fall into that and we might as well never have run away.) At home, they have rules we cant live by.

Later

According to the Sunday Express, which I nipped out to the newsagents to buy from Malcolms Mum, the Russians and the Americans blame each other for the worldwide adverse weather conditions. Apparently, its unseasonably wretched even in the Southern hemisphere there are snowstorms in Australia and icebergs near Polynesia.

President Kennedys scientific advisers are insisting on an international investigation into the Novosibirsk Project, but the Kremlins scientists claim that American oil drilling in Alaska is as likely to be behind the disaster. Both sides have had to admit that theyve bored deeper than they said they would. But it should be hotter inside the Earth, not icy. The Giles cartoon, the main reason for buying the Express, shows Granny on ice-skates leading a crocodile of scruffy children on a reckless careen around the iced-over Serpentine while Mum and Dad try to melt bottles of frozen stout over a fire made with deck-chairs.

Im not sure if John isnt right about the cold being an attack. But theres something else too.

Im worried that its our fault.

I think the Box may have broken something.

It stands to reason that the space has to come from somewhere. The Box doesnt work properly. Could it be that it is turning heat into dimension? And its out of control, increasingly drawing all the warmth out of the planet, adding more and more space to its insides?

We only use a few rooms. There may be as much to explore inside the Box as out.

Grandfather is always tinkering. Trying to cover our tracks.

Its coldest near the Box.

The junkyard is an ice grotto.

Its quite pretty, I suppose. Sparkling white and blue, with light trapped inside the pearly slabs of ice, and the buried shapes of the scrap iron vague behind the semi-transparent frozen thickness.

Early in the evening, after listening to Alan Fluff Freemans Top Twenty on the wireless (Foot Tapper by the Shadows is Number One

yuck!), I went searching for Grandfather.

He wasnt in his laboratory or the Control Room.

Away from the fan-heater in my room, the Box is cold enough to frost my breath. I followed the cold to the door, which was open a crack, and peeked out. Thick cables ran from Grandfathers laboratory out through the door, so I knew he was experimenting nearby.

I was chilled by more than just the cold.

In the junkyard, Grandfather was talking to someone.

Through the door-crack, I saw Grandfather wrapped up with a Russian fur hat and woolly cloak holding up what might have been a large loudhailer or a small observatory dish with a crystalline filament extending from its centre.

I could only hear odd phrases. I wasnt sure if he was having a conversation or muttering to himself. … an act of usurpation … pestilential invaders …

original tenant, eh? … itll get colder, of course … big ball of intelligent ice …

He was having a conversation. I saw him nod and listen, but couldnt make out another voice, just a sound like someone gargling with ice-cubes.

I recognised the whispering. The presence I had sensed last night. I should have known that Grandfather would have felt it too, and taken steps to make contact with it.

He often says that Earth is no place to go for a decent conversation.

Grandfather was looking up at whoever whatever he was talking with. He pointed his apparatus.

I risked opening the door a little wider.

There was no one with Grandfather, but he stood in front of a wall of glistening, shifting ice. Inside were shapes, like the Palaeolithic men sometimes found in glaciers. The shapes werent moving, but the ice was. Its surface was fluid, but not liquid.

Last night, I had thought there were eyes in the ice. Now, there were faces too.

And so you wish to rid yourself of this infestation, my friend, said Grandfather.

What do the pests call themselves? Human beings? Clearly, no loss at all to the greater scheme of things. Prior right of occupation, in this case, is certainly on your side. We shall see what can be done, my dear fellow. I regret having caused you any inconvenience. Its not my place to get in the way, not at all, not at all.

I let the door shut, pinching the cable.

My hearts were racing.

Later

Grandfather came in. He didnt speak to me.

I worry about him.

I worry about why we are here, and what we might do. Im more like him than them, the people he calls the infestation.

I might seem to fit in, if only marginally, but its just pretending.

I am not of this Earth. Like the Mekon.

The only person Ive told is Malcolm, because he accepts everything as a magical mystery. Yesterday, he asked me whether if there was still snow on the ground Father Christmas would come again at Easter. He thinks a race of tiny people live inside television sets, ruled by giant bodiless heads called Announcers. Ive told him about other planets, other places. When he grows up, hell think I was just telling him stories.

That makes me sad.

Human beings people are aliens. Singlehearts who race through their lives, grow up and old fast, wear out their faces without ever changing.

But theyre not an infestation.

This is their home, and we are their guests. Nobody even invited us.

I think, fighting mindache, we ran away from School. Where we come from, the Masters are angry with us.

I can get round the mindaches. Theres a way to remember without hurting, by thinking in equivalents. So long as I dress up what lies beyond my mental fogs with the scenery of the Here and Now, I can remember Home.

Because of persistent talking-back in class, a Teacher wanted to give Grandfather a million Lines and the Cane. Grandfather appropriated School equipment (the Box) without a note from the Groundskeeper, and bunked off Double Geog, persuading me to ditch Games and come along with him for a half-holiday. Were off the grounds, and the Truant Officer is on the case. Weve been on a spree of rule-breaking: smoking behind the bikesheds, running in the corridors, stealing from the tuck-shop, laughing in Assembly, appearing improperly uniformed.

If we get hauled back to School, itll be worse than Detention.

Theres one last rule Grandfather hasnt broken. A big one, a defining rule that is written into his (my?) brain, like the impulses that keep the lungs breathing and the hearts pumping. The primary rule says we mustnt meddle. We live outside time and space, looking in, observing, noting, taking an academic interest. But we do not meddle. The theory is that it is all none of our business. We accept no blame or credit. We know everything but affect nothing.

Here, I can admit this: I am a rebel. Like Arthur Seaton. Like Lawrence of Arabia.

I dont think I believe in rules at all. Even especially the primary rule.

I think meddling is an obligation.

I want to be a part of time and space. When we left Home, machines in the Box came to life: clocks, to tick away the seconds; odometers, to measure the miles. Grandfather put those devices there, though they had no purpose until we ran away. Home isnt a place where anything happens. Space there is like it is inside the Box if youre measuring all the dimension in the universe, the space of Home doesnt count. When we left, we winked into existence, entering the steady stream that runs from past to the future, emerging from the Box to become dimensional. Before that, I dont even know if we qualified as being alive.

I worry that Grandfather has the primary rule still in his head, that running away from Home hasnt helped him run away from his conditioning. In the Box, we may always have Home with us.

(Maybe the Box is still at Home; what we stole might only be the Door.) I have the no-meddling rule in my head too, but because Im young (only on my first face), it hasnt taken root. Something always tells me not to interfere, but I can argue against it. Even at the cost of losing memories, I can resist the Schools discipline.

I think this is why Grandfather took me with him.

There are things I can do that he cant.

Monday, April 1st, 1963

April Fools Day. Stupid jokes at School. A sign up on the notice board promised champagne and chips for the first twenty pupils who ask the dinner ladies for the special menu. Mr Chesterton sent Little Titch out of the classroom to fetch a left-handed blackboard rubber from the supplies cupboard. Year One kids ran about, attacking each other and then chanting pinch, punch, first of the month, no return of any kind. Whats the point of that? Does saying no return of any kind really oblige someone whos been pinched and punched not to retaliate?

Spring is supposed to be here. No fear of that.

Later

Gillian sat next to me in English as usual, and chatted as if nothing bad happened between us on Saturday night. If shes chosen to forget, then I will too.

It doesnt matter that she called me a sad clown.

Shes my friend. Ill hang on to that. All my doubts and fears were wasted. I should be used to it.

People are changeable. Their lives are so brief and busy that they have to crowd all the emotions they could possibly feel into a short time, like a thirsty man drinking in a pub after last orders have been called. It explains a lot about the way human beings have run the Earth.

Besides, Im more concerned with what happened afterwards, with the presence in the ice. The thing Grandfather was talking with. Now, I feel it at School, on the street, everywhere. Its less obvious when the

suns out, but its still there. I have become afraid of the snow.

Later

At morning break, there was a big snowball battle.

It was viciously cold. Thick, gloomy cloud cover made mid-morning seem like nightfall. A sharp wind blew darts at exposed skin, driving children into sheltered corners.

I had a dreadful feeling, an after-the-iceberg, before-the-sinking numbness.

Officially, Mr Carker has banned snowballs, but teachers started this to-do. Mr Chesterton caught Ape Okehurst, who takes Games, on the back of the head, and shouted April fool! Mr Okehurst swore bloody revenge, authorising his soccer pets to pitch in and support his cause.

F.M., no teachers favourite (though his resident buly position is at least tolerated at Coal Hill), made a small, hard-packed ball and tossed it as if shot putting, hitting Gillian in the head. I was standing close to Gillian, near the original snowman, and heard the crack of the ball hitting her. It fell apart. A couple of marbles were clustered in the middle.

What a rat! A rats rattiest rat!!

Gillian, red-faced with rage, made fists.

Anything your old man can do, I can do better, said Francis.

He had his gang with him.

Gillian gets in trouble for fighting. She could charge through a pack on the hockey pitch, even without a stick. Sometimes, she loses control and goes berserk. I know she tries not to. She was trying now. If she forgets herself, she hurts people. She once won a fight with a Year Six lad who touched her chest.

If your old man can put you in hospital, said F.M., I can put you in the undertakers.

If Gillian went wild, the F.M. gang would have an excuse.

Instead, she picked up one of the marbles a green glassie and flicked

it at him.

I dont know if she was aiming for his eye, but she bopped him just above the eyebrow. F.M. yelled and found he was bleeding.

The snowball fight was making so much noise that no one noticed.

Mr Chesterton tried to call a truce, but Ape was being merciless. They had big boys

games to play.

F.M. took out his cricket bat and grinned, nastily. Half his forehead was blue, and a crust of frozen blood marring his temple like a birthmark.

I stood in front of Gillian, hoping F.M. wouldnt hit me with the bat.

You stay

away, I told F.M.

There are rules in the playground. Not School Rules, Kid Rules.

are things boys cant do to girls in fights. For the purposes of fighting, Gillian isnt a girl. But I am. Rules get broken all the time, though.

F.M. took a swing. I was sure my head was about to be knocked for a six. The bat whistled past my face and F.M. turned round, gaining momentum. The bat slammed against the snowmans head. His gang cheered. A flurry of ice-drops came off the snowman. The cheering died.

The snowman wasnt beheaded. The impact hammered one of the pebble-eyes deep into the head and left a flattened mark.

F.M. dropped the bat and held up his hands, wrists badly jarred.

He said words I

wont write down.

I went near the snowman, puzzled. It must have become an ice statue,

solid as marble. There was a creak inside the snowman. Its head turned. F.M. screamed like a girl. I got out of the way. The snowman came to life. It rose a couple of feet into the air, fused-together legs extending into a thick column. Arms came away from its sides, outsized

hands sprouting a dozen icicle-barb fingers. Powder snow clung to the surface of the

body, but the insides were clear ice, cracking and knitting.

F.M. was crying, and no wonder.

The snowhead still bore the mark of his bat. The cap and scarf gave it a

jolly look. The snowman flowed across the playground, more like a giant white slug than a tubby cartoon person. It towered over F.M., pointing an arm down at him.

Spears of ice shot out and went into his leg, shearing through his trousers.

Bright red blood spattered across the footprint-studded white ground.

F.M. screamed again, like an infant, like a baby. He wet himself. (Itll be hard hanging on to the resident buly office after wetting himself in front of the whole school. Do I sympathise? No fear.) The snowball battle was suspended.

The snowman froze.

Mr Okehurst came over and asked what had happened. Mr Chesterton went for the nurse.

Out with it, Minto, demanded Mr Okehurst. Who did this to you?

Sobbing, F.M. pointed up at the snowman.

It had shifted maybe five feet across the playground and was tilted over, but its arms were by its side. The bark-pieces smile Id put on its face was elaborately innocent. Ape had missed it coming to life.

F.M. couldnt speak. He was shuddering into shock. Mr Okehurst gripped the bullys leg with both hands, stemming the flow of blood, keeping clear of the other wetness.

The F.M. gang had scattered to the winds.

The bell went, for afternoon lessons.

It … it was th-th-them, sir, said F.M.

It took me a moment to realise he was pointing at us.

Girls, said Ape, in disbelief.

I was about to protest, but Gillian held my arm.

This wasnt justice, but she knew how it would come out. If we explained, it would be worse for us.

The nurse turned up, with bandages and liniment. The other children

had gone in.

You two juvenile delinquents are going straight to the Heads Office, said Mr Okehurst. He looked down at his bloodied hands, and shook his head. I dont know what things are coming to. I expect this sort of idiocy from the lads. But …

girls!

Later

We got DT (Detention). Not just today, but all week. If Mr Carker could keep us in over the Easter holidays, he would. The Strap was mentioned. If it werent for the fact that the teachers knew F.M. had most likely started any fight he was in, wed probably be for the Cane. Gillian is the only girl ever to have been caned at Coal Hill.

Your parents will be informed, said the Head. I shall telephone.

Gillian was suddenly frightened, more than when the snowman came alive. More than when she had to step into the Heads Office for punishment.

Dad isnt on the phone, she said.

The Head glared at me.

I live with my Grandfather.

And is there a telephone in your house?

Ive never seen one.

Mr Carker slammed a ruler down on his desk, as if a childs hand were held out in front of him. In his small study, the sound was loud and echoey.

Do you think youre being funny, Foreman?

I didnt know what to say. I couldnt explain. A lot of things can be found in our house, many of them surprising to most people (an elephants foot umbrella stand full of assegais, a chrono-synclastic infundibulator), but the one thing anyone might expect to find (a telephone) seemed to have gone missing. I couldnt say for certain that there wasnt a phone somewhere, but it had never come to light.

Theres a boy in the hospital. I wont put up with jokes.

No, sir.

Neither Gillian nor I tried to tell about the snowman.

Theres no point with grown-ups. They live on a different plane of reality. I dont know if they choose to or not, but they have a strange ability to ignore whats going on in front of them.

Mr Carker compromised and gave us sealed notes to be handed over to our parents or guardians.

I trust that the punishment levied on you in School for this atrocity will be doubled when you get home.

Gillian didnt say anything.

If she handed over the note, shed be in a worse state than F.M. tomorrow morning. It was the thing we didnt talk about, but which I knew. In a flash, I understood that the Head knew it too, that everyone knew. He was just going along with it, not saying anything.

You cant do that, sir, I said. Gillians Dad will …

Mr Carker examined at me like a specimen.

Will what, Foreman?

Gillian also looked at me, startled and with real hate, much worse than when I gave our age away in front of the Ton-Up Boys. Even she would rather go along with it, take a belting, than say out loud what it was like for her at home.

Nothing, sir, I said, ashamed.

Later

Id never had a DT before, but I knew what it would be like. A group of pupils, convicted of minor offences (ie: not worth the Strap or the Cane but worse than Lines), were kept in School after the end of lessons for two hours and used as slave labour for dirty jobs.

One of the others on DT today was Joe Gibson, whose Dad is a shop steward. He said Detention is a way of saving Coal Hill money on proper handymen. He was a DT veteran, mostly for talking back and questioning School Rules John once called him a typical barrack-room lawyer.

The DT crew was five boys all from Year Four and Five, mostly for ill-timed, after-twelve-noon April Fool jokes and Gillian and me, under the supervision of Ape Okehurst. We had to report to the Assembly Hall when all the other pupils were leaving for their buses or walking home, and be given our tasks and equipment.

I hear you put that Neanderthal Minto in hospital, said Gibson. Well done, ladies.

Someone had to teach that porky git a lesson.

Gillian wasnt talking to me.

She was thinking a lot. About what Id nearly said to the Head. That was more important to her than the snowman.

I couldnt help but think of the snowman, though it made my head hurt.

It wasnt anything to do with my usual fog-patches, but it was in a related area.

Unexplained phenomena are short-cuts into the fog. Whenever John wants to talk about flying saucers buzzing the RAF or Stonehenge being an ancient spaceport, I get an instant migraine as my brain warns me not to join in.

The snowman came alive.

The presence wasnt just in Totters Lane. It was here, too. And it was getting frisky. Showing itself. Flexing icy muscles. Mr Okehurst had us put on our coats, scarves and gloves and took us to the equipment shed and issued heavy-duty gear.

Picks and shovels. Blowtorches. Ladders. After consideration, he even doled out oilskin slickers to wear over our coats. DT regulars groaned, sensing an unpleasant chore in the offing.

The job today was to attack the ice. The build-up was so heavy that there was a risk the gutters would be ripped off the walls. Mr Okehurst didnt quite know what to do with Gillian and me, assuming (wrongly!) that wed be useless with picks and shovels.

In the end, he decided we were light enough to go up ladders and use torches on thick ice-patches.

And Hatcher doesnt hold the ladder, he ordered.

Dudley Hatcher, a spotty Year Five boy, was on DT for looking up girls skirts. His nickname was Dirty Gertie.

We trooped out to the gloomy playground. By the time our two hours was up, itd be night and the freeze would be on.

I kept away from the snowman. A scraped trail in the snow marked where it had moved.

It was bigger than it had been, as if children had added to its bulk with padded-on snowballs. Barbed ice branches sprouted from its sides. A beard of icicle tusks fringed its head. It seemed less like a snowman, despite its cap and scarf, than some species of dangerous tree.

The boys held the ladders against a wall and Ape pointed up.

Where gutters met over a pipe there was a clump of ice. It was a blooming mass, a dirty white jellyfish trailing thick streamers down the pipe and along buckled gutters.

Looks like a ton of frozen tripe, said Gibson.

Up there and at it, girls, ordered Mr Okehurst. You lads be ready to smash and shovel the lumps that fall. Gertie, youre on wheelbarrow duty.

On DT, teachers can call kids what they like.

I was worried for a moment that Gillian would take her torch to me when we were up there, but I knew her anger wouldnt last. Not with me. She wouldnt forget, but she was sensible about it. She had got over Saturday night at the Pump; she would get over this afternoon in the Heads office.

We climbed up the ladders.

Race you, she said, speaking to me again.

She scrambled ahead and won. I chose to be careful. The boys down below made comments but looked anywhere but up our skirts.

(Mr Carker has turned down dozens of petitions that girls be allowed to wear trousers to School. I think hed be happiest if we had to wear Mohammedan veils and Idaho potato-sacks.)

At the top, up near the roof, we perched and aimed flame at the ice.

I was glad of the blowtorch, which at least kept my fingers warm. The meltwater soon soaked my mittens, which began to crackle as the wool iced.

Inside the ice was the blurred shape of the gutter-joint. Water flowed where the torch-flames played.

Watch out below, said Gillian out loud. A large chunk detached and avalanched to the ground, smashing into jagged ice-cubes.

The snowmans dangerous, I said to Gillian, quietly so the others couldnt hear.

We should melt him, she said, holding her blowtorch steady. With these.

Thatll get us more than a DT, I reminded her. Mr Carker likes the idea of the snowman, remember.

Crusty Carker doesnt know what planet hes on.

A cracking ripple ran along the iced gutter.

My ladder slid out under me. Gibson and two other boys struggled to hold it upright.

My blowtorch fell, and the boys had to get out of the way. The ladder wavered in the air and crashed away from the wall.

I held the ice-coated gutter with unfeeling fingers. My insides turned around.

I didnt understand why I wasnt falling. Then I realised Gillian had a hold of my shoulder, fist tight around a fold of my slicker.

Get your feet on the other ladder, Foreman, shouted Ape. I saw Gillians screwed-up face, remembering how shed looked at me in the Heads study.

Dont worry, Susan, she said. I wont let go.

I hadnt thought that she would.

But I still got my feet on the ladder and found hand-holds. It was awkward for both of us, but we clung together to get balance. Mr

Okehurst and all the boys were holding the bottom of the ladder. Even Dirty Gertie was needed.

The gutter was rippling. Close up, I saw ice moving like sludge, wriggling in waves, not liquefying but flowing. It was crackling, like the snowman.

Gillian and I looked along the gutter.

All the ice was alive, hanging from the window-frames and eaves and tiles. It was moving. Even frost on the windows shifted, reflecting the sunset, making transparent star-shaped rainbows.

There was a scream from below.

Gillian and I looked down.

The snow carpet writhed, swarming up over the boys shoes and socks, rising to knee-level. The ladder swayed as the boys let go and started dancing and stamping, trying to escape.

I saw blood blotting Dirty Gerties turn-ups.

The snow was full of spiny ice chunks.

A fist of ice shot out of the mass wound round the gutter and whizzed just past my face, aiming at Gillian. It was at the end of a solid tendril. I saw through the ice-arm, with its near-molten centre and iron-hard outer skin. Deadly diamonds scratched for my face like fingers. Gillian shoved her blowtorch at the attacking arm, and its claws went to water.

The ladder wouldnt stay upright much longer.

We were just by a big window, panes frosted over. I nodded at the glass and shouted Torch it. Gillian, forgetting any rules about damage to School property, played the flame over a stretch of the glass. The frost, which seemed about to make a hideous face, melted instantly. I kicked at the pane. A bad idea. My weight pushed the ladder away from the wall without breaking the window.

Gillian held onto the ladder with both hands, dropping her torch, and stiffened her body, pointing her feet at the window like a pole-vaulter. The ladder swayed out, away from the wall, then pendulumed back. I swung round to the other side to help with the momentum, bringing Gillians stiff-legged weight against the window.

The glass broke inwards, and Gillians bare legs hooked on the sill. She was scratched and bleeding.

She slipped through into the classroom, and pulled me with her. The ladder fell away.

We huddled by the window for a moment, hugging, then poked our heads up over the sill.

Down in the playground, Mr Okehurst and the boys lay in scatters of blood, living frost swarming over them, icicles through their clothes and bodies. Spikes rose and fell from the ground, moving the corpses.

Gillian had never seen anyone dead before.

There was no point in wasting time on asking what was happening.

Weve got to get out of here, I said. Grandfather will know what to do.

Gillian shook her head.

No grown-up knows what to do, Forehead. Look at Ape down there. My Dad wont be able to cope with this. Neither will your Granddad.

I couldnt tell her that she didnt know Grandfather.

Also, I wasnt sure whether Grandfather would want to help the infestation. He might be on the side of the snow. Or he might want to fold his arms and watch what was happening. Helping could come under the category of meddling.

If we get out, said Gillian, itll be up to us. No parents, no teachers, no policemen. Just us.

There was a scraping noise in the now-dark classroom.

We both turned. Gillian picked up a chair, like a lion-tamer.

Its me, said a voice. Gillian, Forehead, its me. John.

He came forward. He wore his coat over a khaki shirt and trousers.

R.O.T.C. was called off. Due to the weather. There was no way of telling Dad to come and collect me early.

A lot more is going to be called off due to the weather, said Gillian. Look out there.

The snowman was on the move again. And it wasnt alone.

Other, lesser snowmen were on the grounds. They assembled, like troops. Some werent made by human hands. A drift detached itself from the side of the bikesheds and formed into a legless shape, an ice skeleton cloaking itself with powdery snow.

They look like knights in armour, said John.

Cold Knights, I said.

Gillian laughed and punched my arm. Her laugh was slightly cracked.

Are there people inside? asked John.

No, theyre just ice, I said.

The Cold Knights reviewed the fallen, Mr Okehurst and the DT boys.

Whats happening? John asked.

He was looking at me, expecting Id know the answer. This isnt normal, he said.

And neither am I? So I should just know? No, Fore … Susan. Its just that, well, you know funny things sometimes, things most people dont. This from John the Martian. Thank you very much.

John was crestfallen. Id made a mistake and used his nickname out loud. Gillian called him Martian all the time and it didnt matter, but he hadnt expected it of me.

All this is very complicated. Emotions, illogical reactions, the whos-in-whos-out game, who likes who, who hates who, who used to hate who but now likes who. Im not a singleheart but Im not left out of it. I cant help thinking that things are done more efficiently on more rational worlds.

The thought was like a needle in my brain.

Sometimes, along with the pain, come true glimpses. Not paraphrases, but the unearthly actuality. The fog clears momentarily and I see or remember something.

Rarely anything useful. It adds to the confusion, really.

There is a rational place somewhere. Grandfather didnt want to live

there. Given the choice, neither did I. Though I felt the appeal of serenity, of calm, of dispassionate observation, I also knew it wasnt for me.

My hearts were beating out of time with each other. Susan … Susan, what happened?

John was staring into my face, eyes huge behind his specs. My face stung. Gillian had just slapped me.

You went away for a second, said John. Into the Twilight Zone.

I gulped and apologised.

Its all a bit much, I said.

The Cold Knights are on the march, said John.

I looked out of the window. It was full night now, and the streetlamps had come on outside the school. A dropped blowtorch still burned, spreading a fan of firelight across the playground. The snowman led his troops away from the building. They moved in unison, more like one many-bodied creature than individuals. Without legs, they couldnt walk so they crept, sometimes rolling over like balls, gathering scraps and pebbles to snowy hides, stretching out icy tentacles.

What I wouldnt give for a flamethrower, mused John.

The Knights halted, near the school gates.

A vehicle was turning into the driveway, headlights freezing the army of snowmen.

Its Dad!

The vehicle was a Jeep. Captain Brent was in it, with his driver.

Johns father hopped out of the Jeep, snapped an irritated glance at the Cold Knights as if they were just obstacles, huffed plumes of white exhalation and stamped a bit.

Dad, Dad, John called.

The Captain heard something, but took a moment to realise where the noise came from and what it was.

What are you doing up there? You should be ready to go. Were behind schedule.

Dad, stay away from the snowmen.

He had walked across the playground. He stood over the blowtorch.

Damned dangerous, this, he said, picking it up. What fool left it lying about?

Dad, the snowmen! Watch them. Captain Brent was irritated and puzzled at the same time. Then the

penny seemed to drop.

Oh yes. April first. Hah bloody hah.

Dad …

John was almost crying, trying to get through to his father.

The blowtorch cast light around the playground. Captain Brent saw the dead bodies. He whirled around. There was a scream.

The Cold Knights were attacking the Jeep.

They were like a wave, flowing over the driver. They snowmen suddenly melded, a living glacier rising up and crashing down. The driver was trapped inside, a blurred scarecrow in a semi-transparent block. I dont know if the soldier was crushed or drowned, but it was over quickly.

Lets go, said Gillian. Were no safer here. Tentacles of ice had twisted through the open window, and were pulsing, weaving together.

We clattered out of the classroom, down the stairs and out through the Crush Hall onto the playground. Captain Brent still held the blowtorch, perhaps the most useful weapon in the circumstances, but its flame was guttering.

The giant ice fist that had gripped the driver was around the entire Jeep, lifting it off the ground. Its bonnet buckled under the pressure, tires crushed, doors burst and broken.

Captain Brent had nothing to say.

Dad, its an attack, John explained.

That got through to him.

You little idiot, he snapped at his son. What have you done now?

John was brought up short. Behind his glasses, his eyes were watery.

Its not my fault, he wailed.

Whenever theres a ruckus, youre in the middle of it, Johnno. Who elses fault would it be? Youve torn it now. A trickle ran down Johns face.

There was a loud crunching noise. The Jeep was in pieces now, some forced out through the ice. The Cold Knights reformed, emerging from their morass, more human-shaped.

Most had two stiff legs, and could march. They were sleek rather than tubby.

Gillian looked at the Cold Knights and at Johns Dad. Captain Brent stood stiff and stern, refusing to acknowledge the ice creatures.

Youre mad, Gillian said to the grown-up. Completely mad.

Dont you talk to my Dad like that, said John, wiping his face with his sleeve.

Gillian looked up at dark skies in disbelief.

The Cold Knights were coming for us.

We had to pull the Captain into the Crush Hall, then barricade the entrance by hauling a heavy cabinet of sport trophies across the doormat. The grown-up wasnt any help, but didnt try to stop us. Some of the windows either side of the doors smashed. Snow blew in.

I felt tiny stings and wiped my face. My mitten came away bloody.

The snow was sharp. Each flake was a tiny, malicious razor.

We retreated from the Crush Hall into the Assembly Hall.

Im completely off schedule now, Johnno, barked Captain Brent. This wont do at all. Your mother will have something to say. And the C.O.

Keep your Dad quiet, Gillian told John, I need time to think.

Johns father didnt believe a child had spoken about him like that.

Now see here, he began.

I know how to see off the Cold Knights, said Gillian, interrupting, eyes shining.

We should burn down the school!

Instinctively, I loved the idea!

Uh-huh, no-can-do, girlie, said Captain Brent. Public property.

Tuesday, April 2nd,1963

We slept in School. Working out that the furnace must be kept on overnight to stop the pipes freezing (some hope!), we broke into the boiler room and made shelter there.

I fetched my satchel from my desk to write my diary.

Im still leaving a record for the future. Only Im not sure any longer that I expect to be in it. If the Cold Knights get us and another ice age descends, trapping all of the infestation like glacier men, maybe itll be millennia before these frozen pages are found.

Hello, posterity.

Um, posterity implies I have children, which I dont. So its: hello, futurity.

We found food by breaking into the tuck shop, on the assumption (which I wouldnt expect Mr Carker to go along with) that the Emergency suspends the Rules. We made a feast of cold Cadburys chocolate and Smiths crisps. John and Gillian were content to drink Tizer, but I ventured into forbidden territory (the Staff Common Room) and found an electric kettle to brew up a pot of tea. The Common Room stinks of stale tobacco. I didnt find the fabled library of confiscated Liliput and Health &

Efficiency magazines or Hank Jansen and Dennis Wheatley paperbacks. My missing Saturday Night and Sunday Morning did show up, with the bookmark moved on which means that someones been

reading it! I needed the tea for the warmth as much as the taste. Only by wrapping both hands around a steaming mug could I unfreeze my fingers to the point of managing tiny feats of dexterity like uncurling the little blue-paper twist of salt to shake into a bag of crisps.

Captain Brent snorted disapproval of looting, but still ate his chocolate and drank his tea. Johns Dad really is completely mad. He cant accept what hes seen, so hes chosen to ignore it. Grown-ups can do that. Children cant. Gillian doesnt waste time questioning what shes seen. She concentrates on coping with it. Wrapped up in blankets from the nurses cupboard, we slept by the clanking, spitting furnace. It was actually too hot in the boiler room, and I couldnt do more than doze in spells, troubled by vivid dreams.

Running from the Masters, with Grandfather. Scarecrows in gowns and mortar boards always at our heels. Being shut up in smaller and smaller boxes. Time slowing and speeding and space folding on itself. The Rules throbbing in my mind, like a brain tumour. Never entirely caught, never entirely free. Endless corridors. Captures and escapes. My throat raw from screaming. Infinite homework. Being ignored by the grown-ups. Rasping voices. Clutching hands. Everything changing around me. Bloody torn-out hearts. Heads in baskets.

In a nutshell, a nightmare.

I was haunted by the half-memory of a particular Master, the Truant Officer. When they were in class together, he was everything Grandfather wasnt. They were the Teachers Pet, awarded Gold Stars, and the Class Dunce, stood in the corner. At Home, the Truant Officer was highly regarded. He dressed smartly and knew the Rules by heart. His reports were covered with orderly ticks. His Box was full of silver cups, awarded for punctuality, self-discipline and meritorious conduct. He was a chap on the rise, a stickler for the Rules, a Good Man to have On the Team, in line for the Headship. When Grandfather ran away, our folder would have been turned over to the Truant Officer for action. He was after us and wouldnt give up until we were caught and Punished. His career depended upon catching us, on not letting there be any exceptions to the Rules.

We would get Detention. And the Truant Officer would become Head.

In my dream, I saw his face, smiling blandly through a neat black beard, cleverness sparkling in his cold, cold eyes. I heard him laugh, and for a moment remembered everything.

I woke up in blue light. The slit-windows were iced over. And it was all gone, except for a headache.

Later

By default, Gillian is in charge.

Ive said we should go to Grandfather, but Gillian wont listen. According to her, no grown-up will be any use. She has Captain Brent on hand as a living example.

The telephones are out of order and we cant find a wireless. The caretaker hasnt come to open up the school, which at least puts off the trouble well be in for breaking locks and doors.

In the night, I thought I heard noises from outside. Screams. Breakages.

The Cold Knights are on the march.

Later

Breakfast: more sweets. Its funny how you can get fed up with chocolate.

After dawn, we emerged from the boiler room, and looked around cautiously. The bodies and the broken Jeep were still in the playground, half-buried under fresh snow.

John is the most upset by the corpses.

I worried the whole city would be dead, but plenty of people were milling about even before nine oclock Assembly. Some children and teachers arrived as normal, full of stories about things theyd heard in the night or rumours going round the district.

Supposedly, there is some big snow-related fuss up the West End. There were many absences. It obviously wasnt going to be a normal school day, but most people were trying to pretend otherwise.

The Year One and Two girls played skipping games, as usual. Boys skidded around on the patches of dangerously slick ice in the car park, arms out for balance. Some took nasty spills, but no bones were broken.

The Head flapped around, infuriated by the damage to various doors and windows. Rules were bending, ready to break. It was obvious that

it wasnt all down to the weather.

According to conventional wisdom, snowstorms dont kick in locks.

Mr Carker saw Captain Brent, and came over, glowing with relief. Thank Heavens someones in charge, he said. What on earth has been going on?

Vandalism and indiscipline, said the Captain. Of the worst sort. You have my permission to give the boy the Cane. Its what he needs to get him back on track. I was flogged at my school and it never did me any harm. Its all this permissiveness and laxity, you know. Late night so-called satire programmes on the BBC. Thats what causes chaos like this.

The Head noticed the dead people.

Is that Okehurst? he said.

I looked at Gillian and John. These grown-ups werent going to help.

The snowman stood over the corpses. In the daylight, he wasnt moving. The sun shone through a chink in the clouds. The snowy face sparkled with innocence, smiling blandly.

There were pink streaks in the ice-white. Blood.

Get up, Okehurst, shouted Mr Carker. Whats the matter with you, man?

John reached into his coat and brought out a pistol. I noticed the holster on his fathers belt was empty. John had appropriated the gun while Captain Brent was sleeping.

What are you doing with that, Johnno? Give it back at once.

John clicked the safety catch and worked the slide. Hed obviously learned something in R.O.T.C., or at least from reading Commando Library comics.

John pointed at the snowman.

It comes alive, he said, and fired.

The gun kicked in his hand. The noise got everyones attention.

A chunk was blown through the snowmans torso. The bullet shot

straight out of its back, momentum barely slowed. A bright orange crater exploded in the wall beyond the snowman. I wondered if John had considered what would have happened if someone were standing behind his target.

The snowman didnt react. It still smiled. Mr Carker and Captain Brent, both incandescent, stared at John in gasping fury. It was alive, he insisted. The whole playground was quiet. The shot still rang incredibly loud inside my skull. A lot of children had clapped mittened hands over their ears like muffs and were crouched down low, against walls to make smaller targets. Last autumn, during the missile crisis over Cuba, a craze for special air raid warning lessons had struck the school. That was before I came to Coal Hill, but John had said the lessons would be starting up again soon, to deal with the Emergency.

I stepped close to the Cold Knight, to investigate. I touched the snow-and-ice chest.

It was just a snowman.

Last night, yesterday, it had been different.

Its not cold enough, I said, thinking aloud. It has to be below freezing.

Remember, at break yesterday, when it moved for the first time, there was that chill wind. And after dark, when they all came to life, it was well below.

What is this nonsense? asked the Head.

We should have the whole day, I said.

Unless it gets colder, said Gillian.

Of course. Unless it gets colder. If it snows, well know.

Youll all report to my office after Assembly, said Mr Carker. To get the Cane.

Six strokes. I dont care if you are Girls. This behaviour cant be tolerated. Its barbarous.

John pointed the gun at the Head.

If they allowed Capital Punishment in schools, that infraction would earn the Chop.

Theres no School today, said John. No School, ever.

Some kids cheered.

All the children gathered around, and some of the teachers. Having a gun was like holding the conch in Lord of the Flies (which were reading in English Lit). Everyone had to pay attention.

Theres an Emergency, announced John.

Everyone should get home, said Gillian. Before it gets cold again. And stay indoors. Keep the heating on full blast. Make your parents listen, if you can. Look after yourselves, if you cant.

Even the kids who didnt like Gillian much were listening. Everyone had seen and heard things that worried or puzzled them. Now someone was talking sense.

This is unprecedented, said Mr Carker. To Assembly, everyone.

People have been killed, said Gillian. Look.

The Head stood over the corpses, but the sight didnt fit into his idea of the world.

A massacre was no reason to disrupt the time-table. Anyone who leaves School grounds in lesson-time will get a

Detention.

A stuttering dread ran through the crowd. DT, DT, DT.

I am prepared to Detain the whole school, said Mr Carker.

A gasp. I wanted to scream. Why was anyone still taking the Head seriously? He wasnt even wearing the gown of authority he put on for Assembly, just an old mackintosh and wellies.

I think Gillian has the right idea, Mr C, said one of the newer teachers, a youth with a beatnik beard who took Art. Last night, there was a riot in town. The army are all over the streets. The wireless is off the air. There were no papers this morning. Its like the Blitz.

Youre dismissed, snapped the Head. Beats being killed, Daddy-O, said the teacher. We should call the police, John, announced Wendy Coburn, after some thought. And an ambulance.

The phones are dead, said John. Hed sat three desks away from Wendy for four years but shed probably never talked directly to him until now. Its best you get home.

Wendy thought it over and agreed. When she moved for the main gates, her entire clique went with her. That left a hole.

Detention, Coburn, shouted the Head.

Wendy, with her spotless attendance record, hadnt earned so much as a single Line in her whole School career. She flinched, but kept walking, working out a route for her group, to drop everyone off at their homes in strict order, picking up waifs and strays and stragglers.

Then, everyone started leaving.

The only children whod turned up were the ones who lived close enough to Coal Hill to walk. The buses and the tube were probably stopped. Mr Carker tried to issue more orders, but nobody paid attention. He kept shouting Detention, and even its the Cane for you.

Go home, Crusty, said Gillian, not unkindly.

Following Wendys example, knots of children formed into big parties for safety, with teachers nominally in charge, and set out for their homes. Mr Carker joined one group of Year One kids and was whisked off, infants tugging at his arms.

In the end, we were left alone. Me, Gillian, John. And Captain Brent.

Johnno, he snapped, staring down his son, holding out his hand.

There was a long moment of eye contact between them. Meekly, John gave his father back the gun.

Gillian yelped in outrage at Johns stupidity. Captain Brent put on the safety and holstered the gun.

With a hole through it, the snowman was like a Henry Moore sculpture.

Good shooting, Johnno, the Captain approved. Youre finally getting your eye in. I knew R.O.T.C. would whip the dreaming out of you, get you into proper shape.

Gillian pointed to her head and made a circular finger motion.

I want to get home before it gets dark again, before it gets cold, I said.

Im no safer at home than anywhere, said Gillian.

Come with me, then. We can look after each other.

Gillian thought it over. When I worked out that the Cold Knights were most dangerous when the temperature was below freezing, she had started thinking I might be worth listening to. I was already walking towards the school gate.

Martian, said Gillian. Are you coming or staying?

Captain Brent was inspecting the damage, clucking to himself about the side being let down.

I cant leave him, John said. Hes my Dad.

Useless, hissed Gillian, exasperated. Bring him along if you must. But be quick about making up your mind.

I didnt think Captain Brent would come, and knew he would be a deadweight if he did (and with his gun, dangerous?). John spoke softly to his father, hauling him out of his muttering mood, then was firm, as if issuing orders. It got through.

Military escort, said the Captain. Jolly good idea.

Gillian held out her hands in wonder.

Youre the leader, John said to her. Lets go.

She knows the way, said Gillian, meaning me.

Where do you live again? asked

John.

Totters Lane.

I know it, said John. By the junkyard.

Thats

exactly it, I said.

Good position, said John. Defensible.

You live in a

junkyard? asked Gillian.

Sort of.

And I thought our gaff was a tip, said

Gillian.

Later

Its a short bus ride, just five stops, from the High Street to Coal Hill. I can leave the Box at half past eight in the morning, catch the bus at the stop outside the Pump and be at School in time to mill around and gossip for a few minutes before nine oclock Assembly. Usually, I dont even bother to get the bus and walk, saving the pennies for chocolate. But the buses werent running today.

The early morning sun disappeared. Grey cloud churned. A chill wind started blowing.

Before leaving School, Gillian thought to break into the Science Laboratory

kicking in locked doors was addictive and requisitioned a small thermometer.

As long as the mercury was above 32° Fahrenheit, the Cold Knights would be asleep. No matter how gloomy it might get, it rarely froze in England in the daytime.

John said the thermometer wouldnt be accurate.

Theres the wind-chill factor.

Okay, cleverclogs, how would you tell if it were freezing?

When its snowing,

said John, looking up.

I felt cold specks on my face.

The school is away from the

shops, in a quiet residential area, next to a park. Front gardens were thickly carpeted with snow, and dune-like drifts humped in the park. The miniature boating lake was frozen solid.

As we made our way down Coal Hill Road, a long sloping street of back-to-back houses, it was impossible not to notice things. Smashed windows and open doors. Prone lumps in the snow. Masterless dogs dragging their leads. A cat licking the face of a frozen woman slumped at a bus stop, her eyes open, her hands like claws. Overturned cars, snowdrifts piling against them.

The snowfall got heavier and we made slow progress.

Everywhere, there were snowmen. Some child-made Frosties, like ours at School with old hats, pipes, coal-lump buttons, carrot noses, brooms tucked under their arms.

Others were dormant Cold Knights, having hauled themselves together and stood to attention. They were icier, more substantial, with great glassy slabs like armour.

Some sprouted approximate faces. All had icicle beards. Many were streaked red.

Its like an army of occupation, said John.

It couldnt be much past ten oclock we should have been finishing R.E. and going off to Science. But the sun was gone. High up, white clouds were swirling, thickening, becoming grey. Gillian kept shaking her thermometer.

The wind whipped my face like stinging nettles. It was against us. Loose snow from last nights fall whisked up into the air and flurried at our faces. My shoes were full of ice and my skirt and socks soaked. My knees were blue and the cold in my toes was more than pain. At least my duffel coat was warm. I kept my mittened hands deep in the pockets. I still wore the oversized slicker Mr Okehurst had issued, like a poncho. That meant I had appropriated School property and taken it off the grounds.

I dont think we can do this trip in one go, I said.

We looked back at the school, still in sight at the top of the hill. Our footprints in the snow were filling in.

This is pathetic, Susan, said Gillian. Its only a little snow.

Captain Brent had an ice moustache and white eyebrows.

We pressed on, struggling to the bottom of the hill and a usually busy main road. Four soldiers in arctic gear fur-lined parkas and enviable boots

manned a checkpoint. A fire burned in a barrel, as if for roasting chestnuts. An armoured car was making its careful way along the road, steering around abandoned, snowed-in vehicles.

A soldier saluted Captain Brent.

As you were, man, he said. Ive been incommunicado. Whats the sit-rep?

The corporal, an acne-pitted youth, didnt know what to say.

We were ordered to maintain this point, sir. Last night. After the incident in Piccadilly Circus.

Incident?

Some sort of ice-storm, sir. They say it was like a glacier, but alive. A lot of casualties. Most of our mob were sent over there, to pitch in. Then reports started coming from all over London. Same sort of thing. A lot of confusion. We got a general order to crack down on looters and rioters, then comms went up the spout. A lot of dead air. Lieutenant Perkins authorised us to use live ammo, then went off to get more orders from HQ.

Scarpered, more like, someone muttered. We battened down the hatches here, said the spotty corporal, but only had a couple of false alarms in the night. The soldiers must have huddled round their brazier while the Cold Knights were killing people in Coal Hill Road. We should have been relieved at zero three hundred hours,

said the corporal. Are you our relief, sir? asked another soldier, a private. Only weve not had so much as a cuppa.

John, Gillian and I gathered around the barrel-brazier, extending our hands over the burning coals, trying to get as close to the heated rusty metal without actually touching it.

Is this some sort of an exercise, sir? asked the corporal. Surely, were

not at War? Im supposed to have leave today, said the private. I imagine all leave is cancelled, said the Captain. There was

grumbling.

All tea is cancelled, said Gillian. The army is cancelled.

Corporal Spots goggled at Gillian.

Dont talk daft, miss. Listen to this officer. He knows the score. Sorry, sir, but some of these kids …

Captain Brent beamed indulgently. His cheeks were purple with cold.

Its best not to talk to Dad, Corp, said John.

It was sleeting badly, lumps battering down.

Through the roaring wind, I heard a sound. I turned and looked back up the hill towards the school.

Flamin Nora!, said Gillian.

Three snowballs were rolling down the road in formation, picking up snow and grit as they tumbled. They were the spearhead of a deliberate avalanche, a purposeful wall of white.

The snowballs grew.

The ball in the lead, which had ice-spikes protruding from its sides, weaved around a stalled car, but the avalanche swept over everything. A startled man, stepping out of his front door, was borne under, incorporated into the snowfall, disappearing in a tumble of limbs.

We all got out of the way, abandoning the post.

The avalanche hit the checkpoint, smashing the wooden barrier to pulp, and knocked over the brazier, instantly extinguishing the coals. One soldier, clumsy in his winter gear, tripped. Snow slammed down on him. The avalanche growled like a thousand lions, hurling wickedly curved chunks of ice out of its heart.

Rather than fan out when it hit the level street, the avalanche turned away from us, led by the three huge snowballs, and ran up against the armoured car. I saw the metal deeply scored by ice-daggers, then the vehicle was buried. Machine-gun fire came out of the white whirlwind. We all threw ourselves to the ground.

Corporal Spots didnt get out of the way fast enough.

Bullets hauled him off his feet and tore him up. Friendly fire.

(I wish I hadnt seen that, but wishing is no use.) My ears hurt with the noise and the cold.

I found myself holding hands with John, gripping tight. We were wadded together, between a fixed cement rubbish bin and a red telephone box. The phone box was almost entirely filled up with soft white snow. A pale human hand was pressed up against the glass from

inside. Gillian tried to help Captain Brent stand up. A couple of soldiers ran off, into the snowstorm. I thought I heard screams.

The three snowballs, each about as tall as a pony, rolled lazily out of the storm that was settling around the wreck of the armoured car. The first advanced to Gillian and the Captain and stopped, and its comrades darted around, surrounding them. The ball shifted its insides and a smile came to the surface.

The tree-bark smile I had made.

Thats our snowman, I said.

Johns father took out his gun and shot the ball. This time, the bullet speared through like a very long finger. The tunnel filled in instantly.

I stood up, tugging John, and we ran towards Gillian and Captain Brent.

The balls settled, rising like dough, forming Cold Knights.

A lot of them were on the streets.

Gillian held out her thermometer, like a charm to ward off evil. Suddenly, she was lifted off her feet.

I screamed.

But Gillian wasnt in the grip of the Cold Knights. Captain Brent had taken hold of her by the waist and held her up, above the snowy masses. He tossed Gillian into the air.

Her arms and legs cartwheeled.

She shot out of the encirclement, but the icy blocks slammed together

on the Captain, smashing into clear pebbles slick with blood. Johns father was down Johns hand crushed mine, forcing a yelp out of me before Gillian came to earth. John and I tried to catch her, but instead broke her fall by being under her when she landed.

We fell in a clump and took moments to sort ourselves out.

More Cold Knights piled on Captain Brent.

He bent the wrong way at the waist. His arms kept flailing, but only with the repeated impact. The Cold Knights kept jostling around, pouring ice blows down on Johns father.

Dad, he shouted.

Come away, John. said Gillian, quietly in his ear.

But …

Theres no time.

Both children were shocked by what Captain Brent had done and what happened to him.

Gillian knew how to make herself calm for the moment, to get through the next minutes and think about it later, if ever. I knew she was storing up too much, that it would have to come out. John had to be helped. This wasnt the world he had expected, even waking up this morning. A world without his father.

We ran away, down the street.

Later

A third of the way down the High Street, we were stopped. The storm threw whirls of diamond-sharp snowflakes at us, tiny razor-edged throwing stars. I could no longer feel my feet, my hands or my face except for a light, disturbing tingle I was horribly sure was the first symptom of severe frostbite. We were walking on the spot, gaining inches only by leaning dangerously into the blizzard, then driven back by the force of the storm, slid in the grooves our trudging made in the packed snow. It was a struggle not to be tipped over and blown backwards.

We cast around for somewhere to shelter.

The Wimpy Bar, shouted Gillian over the roar of the storm, pointing.

I remembered the place, and saw its red sign under a dusting of white. It was an American-style hamburger restaurant, named after the character in the Popeye cartoons Malcolm loves. Wimpy Bars were popping up all over the city, replacing greasy spoon Gaffs and Lyons Corner Houses. Everything inside was brightly-coloured plastic, including the waitresses uniforms, the tomato-shaped ketchup squeezebulbs and the squares of cheese melted onto the patties.

We had to link arms and wade through drifts to cross the pavement. Gillian put her shoulder to the doors, but John and me had to help her push them open. We tumbled into the restaurant.

The sudden absence of snowblast and din was a shock.

My tingling turned to a pricking, then the beginnings of a burning. I was worried that within minutes my face would be hanging off in red ribbons.

I thought wed got through most of the day and that it was near nightfall, but by my watch it was only just after twelve.

Children, said a man as we came in, alarmed.

Theres no room here, said another voice. This is our place. Its good here.

Theres food.

Shut the door after you, said the first person. Were you born in a stable?

All three of us had to push to get the door closed against the blowing, drifting snow. No one came forward to help.

The café was gloomy, with no lights on, the big front windows white with drifted snow. My eyes got used to it.

Half a dozen people huddled by the counter.

Susan, Susan, said a tiny voice.

A small person dashed up to me and threw arms around my neck, pressing damp kisses to my face. I weaved a little, but didnt fall over.

It was Malcolm.

I got lost, Susan, he said. On the way to school.

I hugged and kissed him. I hugged and kissed Cowboy Gonk too. I realised I was crying.

I hadnt dared think about what had happened to Malcolm.

Your face is red, he said.

Thank you very much, I replied, trying to sound indignant.

He padded the melted snow and tears off my cheeks with a paper towel. I wondered again what I looked like and decided I didnt want to know. As Malcolm cleaned my face, I started to get feeling back in my skin.

Its Foreheads boyfriend, said Gillian. I didnt mind being teased.

I put Malcolm down. I wiped ice-chunks out of my hair with a wet sleeve.

The icicles hurt, said Malcolm. I got scratched, see.

He had red lines on his wrists. Not deep, but nasty-looking.

But I was brave.

Im sure you were, Malcolm, I said. Your Mum will be proud of you.

Suddenly, I was worried about Malcolms mother. When if ever this was over, thered be a butchers bill to pay, a long list of casualties.

I held on to Malcolm as hard as he held on to Cowboy Gonk.

I know these girls, Henry, said the woman who thought there was no room for us. A thoroughly bad lot. Remember, I told you about them on Saturday night. Painting themselves, at their age.

It took me a moment to recognise the stout woman, who wore a fur-collared coat and mauve gloves. She was Mrs Haigh from the Youth Club, and the tweedy man with her was her husband. The vicars white hair was an uncombed nest around a red egg of bald scalp. One lens of his glasses was cracked across.

I know them too, said another of the group. From the Pump.

It was Zack, from the Ton-Up Boys.

The whole of last Saturday was playing itself back.

Zack still wore his black leather jacket and motorcycle gauntlets, but seemed younger today, less threatening. And he was on his own.

Oh its you, groaned Gillian. Talk about bad pennies.

If I was picking angels to emerge from the snow, he said to Gillian, Id have chosen Brigitte Bardot over you.

Sarcasm is the lowest form of comedy, Flash.

Youve obviously never seen a Norman Wisdom flick.

It struck me that Zack and Gillian liked each other. Even in this blizzard, they had time to feel something apart from fear.

There were new faces: a waitress in Wimpy uniform, with a blonde beehive hairdo, and a policeman, with his arm in a makeshift sling and his helmet missing.

The Haighs seemed to be in charge.

Everyone had obviously suffered through Adventures which had changed them and the way they felt about the world. Or maybe just gave them an excuse for acting the way they had always wanted to.

Constable, ordered Mrs Haigh. Throw this shower out on their ears.

The policeman gave no sign that hed heard her. His eyes were empty. I recognised the symptoms of shell-shock. Of all the people here, he was the most broken.

Except perhaps John.

If its anybodys place, its mine, said the waitress, a woman not much older than a Year Six girl. She was holding a bread-knife like a sceptre of office. And I say they can stay.

You just work here, young lady. Ive eaten enough meals to pay your wages.

You can say that again, said Zack.

Mrs Haigh had a meat-skewer. I pictured her and the waitress squaring off like Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Its cold in here, said Gillian, looking at her thermometer as if her body were no longer reliable. She exhaled, and her breath frosted. It

shouldnt be.

Lectricitys off, said the waitress.

Its only a power-cut, said Mr Haigh. Itll come back on soon. Someone will have telephoned the Electricity Board.

I dont think so, said Gillian.

Whats she rabbiting on about? said the vicars wife. Horrid girl.

You cant talk to people like that, said the waitress.

I pay my taxes and I can say what I want. Its a free country, not Russia.

Though weve got their weather at the mo, said Zack. You girls never did tell me your names the other night.

Susan, I said, tapping my chest, and this is John and Gillian.

Gillian, said Zack, nice name.

Dont wear it out, said Gillian.

This is Dolly, said Zack, introducing the waitress. You obviously know little Malc, and the Haighs.

If you want food, said Dolly, there are buns. And ketchup in those plastic tomatoes. The hamburgers and the chips are here, but theyre frozen and theres no way to defrost them without power.

Mrs H is all for sucking on burgers like ice lollies, said Zack. It may come to that.

Gillian rummaged behind the counter, searching the cooking area.

Youre not to touch anything, young lady, said Mrs Haigh.

Oh shut up, said Dolly.

Well I never …

… if you mean never tipped, thats true.

Youre paid adequate wages, I trust. I dont see why I should augment them just because you grudgingly do your job.

So you dont pass the collection plate on Sundays?

Thats different.

Stop arguing, said Malcolm, quietly.

Strangely, the grown-ups did shut up.

Malcolm had a lot of quiet force. He didnt often get angry or frightened, just closed himself up and got through it. He was used to people treating him like an alien, and had learned how to use it to his advantage.

A lesson worth learning.

Eureka! said Gillian.

In a locker of cleaning things, shed found a rack of overalls. She tossed one set over the counter to me, and struggled off with her slicker, coat and shoes, then stepped into them, not bothering to take off her skirt or cardigan, then fastened the baggy overalls up tight and put her shoes, coat and slicker back on. The mismatched layers made her into a fat clown. The cold added to the effect by giving her a red nose and half-crown-sized roses in her cheeks.

Zack tried a wolf-whistle, but it didnt come out right.

Hardly becoming for a young lady, said Mrs Haigh. What school do you go to? I shall write a letter to the Head. Shouldnt you be in lessons?

Skirts arent practical in this weather, I said.

I detached myself from Malcolm and also got the extra layer of clothing on. I rubbed fabric up and down over my calves and knees, trying to get feeling back.

John laughed.

It isnt very stylish gear, he said. You look like Daughter of Scott of the Antarctic.

His first words since what had happened to his Dad.

Whats happening out there? asked Dolly. Has the city gone mad? There was something about Piccadilly Circus on the news last night. Some sort of rampaging ice-monster, they said people thought it was

the BBCs idea of an April Fool, like the spaghetti trees. Then the wireless went off with everything else.

Its a Judgement, said Mr Haigh. We are being punished for our sins. We have trespassed, and the Lord is pouring down fire and ice.

I havent seen any fire, said Zack. We could use it.

You can sneer, said Mr Haigh. But you should look to yourself and consider the state of your soul.

Its people like you, said his wife, who brought this down on us.

Tearaways, vandals, barbarians, savages, heathens.

Listen, I ride a motorbike, all right, said Zack, irritated. That doesnt make me Attila the Hun. I earn my wages and I pay national insurance just like you.

Theres a reason for all this, said the vicar.

One thing that worried me was that he might be right about that.

Later

He was mad, said Gillian. Johns Dad. Thats why he did it. He didnt know what he was getting into. You saw that.

Gillian and I were alone, away from the seating area, scavenging.

He saved your life, I said.

That made Gillian angry. She couldnt understand.

Why should Johns Dad save my life. I wasnt anything to him.

Duty? I suggested. He was in the army.

She shook her head.

My old man would never …

She didnt finish the sentence.

Do you think Martian will be all right? she asked.

Her eyes were big and wet. Sometimes, its easy to forget that shes a child too.

Shes no more capable than any of us.

Itll never be the same, I said. But hell go on.

Why should we go on?

Because if we dont theres no point to what his father did.

Im cold, Susan.

So am I.

Later

The original idea was to shelter in the Wimpy Bar until we got our wind back or the blizzard died down, then set off down the High Street again. The storm showed no sign of letting up, and it became obvious that this refuge wouldnt be safe for much longer. A long crack appeared in the thick glass windows. A sheet of ice oozed under the door, thick and shiny and purposeful.

We should leave, I told Gillian and John. Soon.

Where have you got to go?

asked Zack.

Susans grandfather, Gillian explained.

Zack raised his eyebrows.

He can help, I said, not sure even as I said it.

A section of glass fell in and

snow cascaded.

Ill come with you, said Dolly. We should get Malcolm out of here.

He wont be safe with them. Dolly nodded at the Haighs. You cant leave, said Mrs Haigh. Youre on duty. I still havent had

my Wimpyburger and chips. I should tell you what you can do with your Wimpyburger and chips, but I wont since these are unusual circumstances. Dolly put on her cloth coat and wrapped a scarf around her peroxide tower of hair.

I took off my slicker and gave it to Malcolm, tucking it tight around his chest and legs, stuffing Cowboy Gonk inside his jumper, giving him a birds breastbone.

Id be all right in just my duffel coat and the Wimpy overalls.

We should pray,

said Mr Haigh. For Deliverance.

You can pray if you like, said Gillian, kindly.

It cant hurt.

Theres a way forward, to Salvation, said Mrs Haigh. Weve discussed it, and now it has come to the moment. We must cut out that part of our society that has so offended God that He has visited this Judgement upon us.

The vicars wife had the bread-knife. Dolly had put it down to tie her scarf.

Mrs Haigh snatched Malcolm from me and held the blade to his throat.

Its the fault of the Young, she ranted.

With their pagan music, irreverent ways, provocative clothes and rebellious attitudes, explained the vicar. We fought a War for you, you know. You ought to be grateful.

This Judgement is upon You!

I didnt know what they were thinking. It was the usual grown-up game of Lets Pretend, with rules that werent disclosed to the Young.

I think you should calm down, Mrs H, said Zack. You dont want to do anything youll be sorry for later.

The serrated edge of the blade pressed into Malcolms skin. He was a

neat little boy, not a scruff. His hands were knotted around the bulge of Cowboy Gonk.

The child is an Abomination, an Unbeliever …

Malcolms family are C of E, said Dolly. Like you.

Mrs Haigh looked up to the ceiling, held up the knife and declaimed Unto you, O

Lord, I sacrifice this … Dolly took a plastic bottle of mustard and squirted it into the womans face. A bright yellow stream hit Mrs Haigh in the eyes. Zack pulled Malcolm away from the woman. She sliced down, stabbing into Malcolms chest.

I screamed.

Zack got Malcolm free. The knife came out of Malcolm.

Mrs Haigh slashed, scraping the knife down the arm of Zacks jacket. The blade scratched the leather but didnt cut through, then got snagged on a zip with a rasp that set my teeth on edge.

Mrs Haigh raised the knife again.

Drop it, said Zack, waving his flick-comb, pressing the stud.

Mrs Haigh threw down the knife before she realised Zack wasnt coming at her with a switchblade. Dolly kicked the knife into a corner.

I grabbed Malcolm and started pressing around the tear in his slicker. He was shaking.

She hurt Cowboy Gonk!

I pulled out the toy. There was a knife-slit in the fabric, white stuffing bulging out of an eye.

Malcolm looked at his beloved gonk, lower lip going in and out, tears starting.

Cowboy Gonk is fine, Malcolm, I said, trying to head off a crying spell. Its easily fixed, easily. A few stitches and hell be good as new.

Suze is right, Malc, said Zack. Cowboy Gonk is on the mend. Listen to him.

Malcolms ears pricked up like a dogs.

Ahm a-fine, pardner, said Zack, ventriloquising out of one side of his mouth.

Sure as shootin and a-rootin tootin. Now lets a-mosey out of this here saloon and hit the trail for Laredo.

Malcolm laughed, astonished.

That tears it, Gillian announced. Were leaving.

We started turning up collars, pulling down caps, winding scarves like bandages.

I hauled open the door, flinching at the icy blast, and held it as Zack and Dolly got Malcolm outside, then watched the Haighs as Gillian and John left. Mrs Haigh stared like a vulture frustrated of carrion.

Dont go, child, said the vicar, pleading. Pray with us.

I felt awful inside. These people had been pushed into a box and reacted in a way no one would have expected. Just as Johns father had.

Well be safe, Henry. We have a policeman with us.

I left the restaurant and joined the others.

Visibility was down to nothing. The blizzard was, if anything, worse.

Zack found his motorbike in a drift, crushed by ice, wheels buckled. He siphoned petrol into a milk bottle and stuffed the neck with his Rupert scarf. Just in case, he said. It was so cold the cocktail turned into a Molotov sunrise, petrol decocting into its constituent ingredients, making different-coloured layers.

Which way? asked Gillian.

For a moment, I didnt know. No recognisable landmarks were left.

But I remembered which side of the road the Wimpy Bar was on. I pointed forward, into the wind. We put our heads down and trudged.

Some people must have had the idea Gillian had about the school, and set fire to buildings to keep the Cold Knights away. The front window of the Green Shield Stamps Centre was blown out. The show goods on

display were melted or blackened. The blaze hadnt lasted long enough to burn down the building or spread to the shops next door.

Snowdrifts already piled up around the wreckage.

Anyone want to loot a fridge? asked Zack. Its normally fifty-eight books.

No one was interested.

We were on foot and against the wind.

In normal conditions, even on an absolutely miserable day, it should have taken ten minutes to stroll from the Wimpy Bar to Totters Lane. With time to stop off at the newsagents, to buy a Bunty and some sweets from Malcolms Mum. Today, it was a two hour forced march.

I checked the newsagents. It was locked up.

Your Mum must have stayed at home, I told Malcolm.

Later

After the newsagents, we came to the Railway Bridge. A curtain of clear ice hung from it, entirely blocking the road. People were caught in the ice, like big insects in white amber. Giant faces on the ice surface slowly made mocking masks.

Well have to go up and cross the platform, said Gillian.

We havent got tickets, said Malcolm, solemnly.

I expect theyll let us off, just this once, I told him. Its not as if were going to catch a train.

I dont think there are any trains, pardner, said Zack.

What about ghost trains? asked John.

The steps up to the platform were inside the station. We passed an unmanned ticket barrier and looked around, relieved to be momentarily out of the windblast. Somebody had smashed the ticket window. The emptied cash register was up-ended on the floor.

Blooming liberties, said Dolly. Some people just make you give up hope. I hope the threepenny bits froze to their hands.

An I-Speak-Your-Weight Machine coughed to life as I brushed past. The cold had got into its mechanism, I suppose. It repeated ten stone, five pounds, two ounces over and over.

The harsh metallic voice gave me the horrors.

Lets get a move-on, Forehead, said John. That thing cant hurt you.

I had to agree with him. But something in the mechanical voice talked to the part of me lost in my mindfogs. I shut it out.

The steps were icy, but not much snow had blown into the stairwell.

Zack led the way. I held Malcolms hand and helped him.

We came out onto the platform. The sky was a uniform grey-white, with no sign of the sun.

Looking across to the other platform, you wouldnt know there was a five-foot trench for the railway lines. Smooth, unmarked snow was packed down. The waiting rooms were blown in, snowdrifts filling them to the ceiling. I saw a black bowler hat lodged in the snow.

A snowmans lost his titfer, said Malcolm.

Yes, I agreed. That must be it.

Do snowmen get cold?

No, pardner, said Zack, holding up his Molotov cocktail. They worry about getting hot. John tentatively stepped to where the edge of the platform must be and put his foot out, bringing his weight slowly down. He was held up. We can just walk over,

he said. No need to go to the crossing. The foot-crossing at the end of the platform was under five feet of snow too.

Zack and Gillian werent happy with the prospect. Zack picked up a heavy bucket of frozen sand and tossed it out onto the rails. It thumped into the snow, but didnt disappear.

Okay, he said. Lets move out.

It was like walking on a frozen lake, not knowing whether the ice was safely feet thick or a flimsy crust. In ones and twos, we crossed the buried tracks.

John, venturing on his own, stepped into a quicksand-like patch. With a squelch, he lost his leg up to the knee. My hearts clutched. John gingerly extracted his leg from the hole.

Ive got snow in my sock, he complained.

It could be worse, Mars-man, said Zack.

A fellow without snow in his sock might find that easy to say, said John.

Come on, children, said Gillian, sharply. No squabbling.

John shook his foot and limped across to the platform. He sat on a bench, and examined his frozen foot.

Zack picked up Malcolm and carried him over.

We all made it across the railway lines.

Thank the Lord for that, said Dolly.

A cadre of Cold Knights loomed out of the drift-filled waiting room and took her.

They were fast now, like ghosts with white enveloping sheets. Dolly was pulled off her feet, icy ropes winding about her, constricting and cutting. She was more surprised than scared.

I hugged Malcolms face to my chest so he wouldnt see. John threw himself off his bench and scrambled away, avoiding white scything tentacles.

The Knights, more massive and less ungainly than last nights crop, barely paused to crush Dolly embedding her in ice and squeezing her like an orange, so she leaked red and moved towards us, dropping the leftover in their wake.

We had no time to react, to scream, to help.

The Cold Knights were between us and the steps down to the High Street. They let Dolly go, abandoning her body like a broken toy, and spread out along the platform, soldiers again.

Behind us, from the rail-bed, drifts shivered into life, rising in shaggy, snow-feathered lumps, extending ice-barbs.

We were caught between the drift masses and the Knights.

Burn them out, Flash, shouted Gillian.

Zack flicked his Ronson lighter a dozen times before he got a flame, then touched it to his Molotov cocktail. He shook well, scrambling the ingredients back into fuel, and lobbed the bottle. It arced, burning fuse fluttering like a banner, and smashed against the Cold Knight who stood between us and the stairwell.

A fire-shroud instantly melted the Knights head and arms to stumps. The snow evaporated and the ice core dwindled in seconds, empty gaps appearing and water gushing. Burning petrol splashes sank through the Knights body, like acid through a paper flower. A circle of bare grey tarmac appeared as the liquid flame soaked through to the platform.

The effect wouldnt last.

I picked up Malcolm and ran.

The drifts and the Knights came after us, converging and combining into one huge, thundering glacier.

We all squeezed into the stairwell and the glacier shattered against the brickwork doorway behind us. I slipped and took a tumble, still wrapped around Malcolm. Zack went over his feet too. Snow and ice poured around us as we rolled down the stairs. I took my lumps, half-falling and half-rolling down the steps. I landed badly.

Someone John took my hand and hauled me up. We ran away from the station exit.

Later

The army isnt on the streets any more. The council isnt clearing up the snow. There are no policemen, postmen, milkmen, binmen. People peer from barricaded upper storey windows, wrapped up warm but not daring to go out. Long-unused chimneys pour thick smoke into the grey sky. Whatever came to hand is being burned in grates left over from before the Clean Air Act.

I dont know how much longer anyone indoors will be safe.

Snow and ice are everywhere, and anywhere they are there can be Cold Knights.

Eventually, it will be night again and the general temperature will plunge well below freezing.

Then we might all be for the Chop.

By day, with the temperature just hovering about freezing point, the Cold Knights are like individuals in an army; at night, when all water is ice, they are more purposeful, like one being, one hostile intelligence a living, thinking, malign glacier.

Gillian still has doubts about going to Grandfather, but she needs something to do, something to fight. She keeps us going, head down with determination, refusing to accept obstacles. John took Malcolm from me and is carrying him. It helps John to have someone to look after.

I keep seeing Dolly, her open-mouthed expression of surprise.

The Cold Knights didnt need to march out of the station after us. They can spring up from anywhere.

Later

We passed three snowmen by the War Memorial. Frozen heads swivelled, carrot-noses pointing at us. One wore an oversized tam oshanter.

After this, if there is an after this, I promise I promise I promise I will never make another snowman.

The turn into Totters Lane was blocked by a twenty-foot-high drift. The tops of lamp-posts stuck out of it.

I suppose we have to get over that, said Zack.

He put his foot on the slope of the drift. It sank in below the ankle. The snow here was looser than in the rail-bed.

Theres never a pair of tennis rackets handy when you need them, said Zack.

Powdery snow closed around Zacks foot and became an ice mantrap. He reacted fast, pulling back, but his boot was still stuck.

Its making teeth, he said.

I knelt and saw he was right. Triangular ice wedges scraped the

leather of his motorcycle boot.

Give me your lighter, I said.

He handed the Ronson down to me. I flipped the top and worked the flint. This time, the flame came quickly. I let it grow to an inch or so, using up fuel fast, then played it around Zacks gripped boot. The ice jaws melted enough to loosen and Zack got his foot free. Thanks, Suze, he said. I gave him back his Ronson. He shook it. All the fluid was gone. Time I gave up smoking, anyway, he said. We all looked up at the snow wall. Mouth-like traps opened and closed,

mocking. You have to be flaming joshing, said Zack. The ice-mouths smiled, showing jagged teeth. This is not going to be easy, said Gillian.

If you cant go through, below, or over, go around, said John. Elementary tactics.

The Pump has entrances on the High Street and in Totters Lane.

How do you know so much about a pub? asked Gillian. John blushed and led us into the public bar, which was dark and abandoned, snow on the tables and carpet. So, you two have finally got into the Pump, said Zack, to me and Gillian. Disappointed? I expected more red velvet tassels, said Gillian. And framed pictures of fat naked ladies. Anyone want a drink? asked Zack. Brandy, whisky … We should get a move-on, said John.

Zack went round behind the bar, searching for spirits. He found glasses, then reached up, but held back. The row of upsidedown bottles had exploded and frozen into amber and green cascades, jewelled with glass fragments.

Ah, he said. Problem.

Zack exhaled, breath frosting.

Even indoors, its

too cold, said Gillian.

The temperature dropped as we went along, said John. Didnt you notice? I remembered the ice was thicker nearer Foremans Yard. We

went through to the saloon bar. Bodies sat at tables, faces frosted. Snowmen, said Malcolm.

The door John had been counting on was locked and chained from the inside. One pane of glass was smashed, showing a wall of snow beyond.

Seems like were stymied, said Zack.

He looked for unexploded bottles, picking them up and shaking to see if any had liquid inside. John made a disgusted face.

Not to drink, Mars-man, Zack explained. To burn.

We cant just give up, said Gillian. Not after getting this close.

Tired, Gillian and I had sat down at a table. Only when I stopped moving did I realise how my arms and legs ached. I took off my mittens and counted my frozen fingers, trying to wrench feeling into them.

Id like to ask Susan something, said John.

Gillian was surprised. John wasnt his old self again, and never would be.

Ask away, John, I said, weary to the bone.

Why is it so important we get to your Grandfather?

I think he can help.

Help? Help us?

Help everyone.

John took off his glasses. His eyes were watery. He pinched the top of his nose and put his specs back on.

Susan, this is an Attack, he began. Its all over the city. Perhaps the country.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, have been hurt or killed. Youve seen those things, the Cold Knights. Where do they come from? What are they? Theyre not the Enemy we were expecting. Weve been moving too fast, staying ahead of them, not thinking about them. Now, Id like to ask questions. Susan, what do you know about all this?

I had no answer. I worried that, pressed further, Id break down.

Lay off her, Mars-man, said Zack. Its not her fault. Shes just a kid.

I resented that but didnt say so.

You dont know Susan, said John. Even before this, she was strange … Thank you very much, I snapped. Martian! Im not from Mars. Im from Northumberland.

What about you, Susan? Where are you from? Cold went to my head, an icepick through an eye.

What is all this rot, John? asked Gillian.

Ask her.

Ask her what?

Where shes from?

Gillian looked at me, wondering what all this was about. Outer space,

said Malcolm. Susan is a Princess. Shes run away from Home. Everyone heard him.

Zack cracked a grin. Anything you say, pardner. John fixed his eyes on me. Gillian looked between us.

You must have noticed, Gillian, said John. She goes away sometimes, inside her head, to the Twilight Zone. She knows things. The mask slips.

Youre saying Susan is a Space Princess.

No, of course not. Grow up,

Gillian.

John took a seat and sat at our table. He folded his arms.

Im saying

shes a spy, he announced. This Grandfather no one has ever met or

seen is her Control. Shes using us to get back to him.

people along the way. She hasnt been harmed, you notice.

She hasnt lost anyone.

Im sorry about your Dad, John, I said. Really, I am. And Dolly, and … these people, and everyone. But Grandfather can make a difference …

John stared at me, hard.

Shes fourteen, Martian, said Gillian, thumping his arm. There are no

fourteen-year-old spies! Except in Enid Blyton books, said Zack. You read Enid Blyton? gasped Gillian. To my little sister, before her bed-time. This is all very sweet, said John, rubbing his arm, nodding at me, but youll notice she hasnt denied anything.

It was as if a wall had been thrown up between me and the others. A see-through wall, but impenetrable. Johns gaze was fixed on me. A glance passed between Zack and Gillian, wheels turning behind their eyes.

Dont talk as if I wasnt here, I said. My voice sounded tiny.

Why are you upsetting Susan? asked Malcolm. He walked across the bar and took my hand. Shes my friend.

The wall was gone.

I was crying again, holding on to Malcolm.

She knows something, said John, quietly. She does.

I know youve had a bad day, John, said Gillian, conciliatory. But you mustnt take it out on Susan.

Had a bad day! I saw my father killed! Saving you!

It was as if he had slapped her. Gillian would never forget what hed just said.

Just what I was searching for, said Zack. Rooting around behind the bar, hed found a ring of keys. Good thing they chained the doors from the inside.

He began testing keys in the padlock. They locked up for a reason, Gillian warned, still distracted. Be careful.

A key turned. Zack loosed the padlock and unthreaded the chains from the double-doors. He tried keys again, in the door-lock. The third key worked.

John and Gillian and I were a triangle, each fixed on the other two.

Before the Cold, we had been friends.

Johns right, I said. Im not from here. Im not a spy or a princess, but Im not from here.

Zack pulled the doors open. A wall of white outside was over his head, but there was daylight visible over the top.

Trust me, John, Gillian. Please.

Zack battered the snow-wall with the chain. It was like iron.

I felt calm, for the first time in hours. I felt the presence of Grandfather, not in my head but nearby.

This flaming thing wont budge, said Zack, kicking the snow.

Let me, I said.

I held Malcolms hand and walked up to the exit. As I neared, the snow melted away, like doors opening.

Zack whistled. John tried to say something but Gillian shushed him.

I didnt know why the ice-mind let me pass. But I had known that it would.

Grandfather wouldnt let the Cold hurt me.

We stepped out onto the street again, in Totters Lane.

Is that your Grandfathers place? Zack asked.

The junkyard, I said. Yes.

Whats going on there?

I looked. The drift was a windbreak, which should have made Totters Lane less blizzardy than the High Street. But a snowy tornado rose, funnel pointed at Foremans Yard. Lined along the pavements were Cold Knights, at attention.

Seems like weve come to the right place, said Zack. Whatever is going on, this is where its going on from.

Be careful, said John. Be careful of her.

Later

I led them to the Box. I dont think phoning the coppers will do much good, Suze,

said Zack. Bundled cables ran out of the door, into the Yard. It was a grotto of living ice, glassy fronds moving like transparent, crackling anemones, white and turquoise and blue.

Grandfather, wrapped in furs like a Tartar chieftain, sat on a shooting stick by a Heath Robinson contraption. It was a composite machine, scavenged parts wired together, built around the skeleton of a fairground pipe organ. Hed cannibalised elements from half a dozen coffin-sized abandoned fridges, those favourite monsters of classroom safety filmstrips. Like all of Grandfathers inventions, this machine consisted of bits and pieces held together with pink string and masking tape, with no thought for design. The organ was decorated with cherubs, painted skins flaking to show blue undercoat, chubby limbs hung with twisted icicles. The inventions worked, most of the time which was the best that could be said of them. This one was certainly doing something, generating a ball of cold blue light, into which the tail of the tornado swirled.

Thats your Granddad? asked Gillian. I nodded. Grandfather was humming to himself, twiddling knobs and pulling

levers, checking gauges and dials. Whats he doing? asked John. Good question.

Later

Its all quite simple, child, said Grandfather. This fellow, the Cold, was here first. It wakes up after a lengthy snooze to finds its homeworld crowded with Johnny-come-latelys. No wonder its on a bit of a tear.

Life takes many forms; here it is active in ice, dormant in water. Fascinating. Unique. Ive yet to determine whether the animus is inherently embodied in the H20 or a bodiless energy that happens to be able to shape frozen water. Millennia ago, in the First Great Ice Age, the Cold was the dominant lifeform of the Earth. One of Evolutions first experiments with Intelligence. A remarkably successful one at that. Its given me the best argument Ive had since I came to this backwater.

The Cold Knights arent from Outer Space? asked John.

Good lord, no. Why would

you think that?

Or from Russia?

Certainly, its been dormant in Siberia. It may have been awakened by

those Soviet refrigeration experiments. Something to do with freezing their

cosmonauts for long space voyages. Or perhaps storing populations underground after

nuclear war until the country is inhabitable again. It isnt very clear on what the

point of the Novosibirsk Project was. And

that Alaskan deep probe was a jab to the

sleeper as well. Then again, it

may be that when the Cold sensed warmth coming, the phenomenon

which enabled the rise of mammal sapience, it set an alarm-clock in the geology, as it were. Whatever reason, the Cold is back, its flexing its mind and

wants to settle in again. Cant blame it.

Its an it, I said. Not a they.

Indeed, Susan. Very perceptive. In its

present stage, the animus of the

Cold its essential self, its brain and eyes isnt everywhere, just where the ice is moving. It has to concentrate itself to take action and it needs the right conditions to develop. If left alone, it will consolidate. All the ice in the world will become its brain and body. Itll be quite something to see.

That means it will get stronger? I asked.

If all goes well. If I make some corrections.

Youre helping the Cold Knights? said Gillian.

It took Grandfather a few moments to hear what Gillian had said. He didnt exactly ignore the people Id brought with me, but treated them as if they were stray dogs or pieces of furniture. Only when they spoke directly to him did he have to concede that they represented a species of intelligent lifeform.

Not exactly, child, he said, holding his furry lapel. Im merely doing my best not to get in its way. My time-space machine is a little leaky, Im afraid, and that affects the natural cooling/freezing process. An enormous amount of energy is being expended and were inadvertently in the way, leeching off the Cold. This little contraption here is just a dampener, to vent the dimensional overspill. We operate on the principle of non-interference with indigenous populations, and it would ill behove us to take sides. Its the first thing were taught: dont meddle. Clearly, this fellow has a strong prior claim on the planet. If you two can come to an accommodation, it would be best for everyone. If not, I dont think the Earth will miss you people overmuch. That might seem harsh, but if you were to think it through I believe youd find the argument had a lot of merit in it.

Youre an alien, said John, accusing Grandfather but looking at me.

Um, what, an alien? No … theres no such thing. Theres only life.

Its all true, said John. Aliens are here, from flying saucers, living among us, undermining our society.

Grandfather snorted. I am not from a flying saucer! What would be

the point of that?

Youll be seeing flying teacups and creeping pepperpots next, and a whole animated dinner service. The human races capacity for believing silly things is one of its least appealing traits.

You lost me miles back, said Zack. Flying saucers?

Grandfather, I said, you must help these people.

Of course, Susan. Just wait until Ive sorted things out for the Cold and Ill give it some thought.

Theyll be dead … extinct!

Yes, quite possibly. Not my fault, though. Not our business, Susan. You know that as well as I do. Were not to meddle, remember. Time must take its course.

I felt in Grandfathers mind. His fog-patches were bigger than mine.

Things were missing. And imperatives burned, stronger with age. He might have been a habitual rule-breaker, but he was set in his ways.

I was angry. This was not his character. This had been done to him.

Its not fair. I said. What did these people do to deserve extinction?

Grandfather considered my friends as specimens.

These individuals? Nothing at all, so far as I know. As for this human race, well … consider the record. When the Cold was sole tenant, this was a peaceful planet, devoted to abstract thought, to learning and expression. Since the rise of mammal bipeds, theres been a lot of squabbling and blood-letting and general brouhaha. Best thing for the universe if our chilly friend takes up where he left off and got on with his business. The Cold built living ice cathedrals, and could sculpt on the level of an individual snowflake. Have you ever seen anything as perfect as a snowflake?

Yes, I said, pointing at Malcolm.

Grandfather considered the little boy. Malcolm tried a smile. He had no front teeth.

Very nice, Im sure.

He got back to the dials and switches.

Now, be off with you all, he said, and let me get on with my work.

A fissure in my mind cracked open, leaking memories and pain. The primary rule of non-interference had been impressed upon me, as it had been impressed upon Grandfather. It was instinct and implant and tradition. Our heritage is of awesome power, the ability to master time and space, but our cultural imperative is not to use that power in any but the most trivial ways. To think anything different is to risk madness and mindwipe.

Grandfather and I had run away, had broken all of the rules. Except one.

We did not meddle. We observed.

Nothing we did affected anything.

I held my head and doubled over, leaning against the Box.

Whats wrong with Suze? asked Zack.

She gets these headaches, said Gillian. She goes away sometimes, into the Twilight Zone.

Shes from the Twilight Zone, said John. Havent you been paying attention? Her and this old man. Theyre not from here. Theyre not like us. Theyre not human. Its why the ice let her through, why it hasnt hurt her. The Cold Knights are after us, human beings. She isnt one. It has nothing against her.

My head hurt so much I couldnt speak.

Gillian stood and thought, mulling over what John had said, over what she was seeing and hearing. Of them all, she was the sharpest, quickest to grasp what was happening.

I gritted my teeth and fought the pain. Sir, said Gillian, addressing Grandfather as if he were a teacher she wanted to get around. May I ask a question?

Ask away. I shant promise to give you an answer you can comprehend, though. Could you stop the Cold Knights if you wanted to? Make them go away? Its an it, not a them. Singular, not plural. I thought Id made that entirely clear.

But could you?

Grandfather pondered a moment. Oh yes, I think so. Quite a simple problem. This gadget turned the other way could siphon much of the cold force. Exacerbate the unintended effect of my time-space machine and drain off almost all of the Colds energies. Make it draw in its horns, as it were. The animus could be localised, perhaps even confined to a single snowflake. An ice crystal would be quite complex enough in its configurations to be at least a temporary receptacle.

Gillian held me, hugging me, and put her hands on my forehead. She was so close she could feel the beating of my hearts.

Then do it, or Ill twist Susans head off!

My mind cleared, suddenly.

Everyone looked at Gillian and me. Her hands were over my ears, in a firm grip. She was strong. She probably couldnt twist my head off, but she might well be able to break my neck.

Her eyes were grim. I believed she would do what she said.

Grandfather peered down his nose at us.

Why ever would you want to do that, girl? Sheer perversity? It just goes to illustrate what Ive been saying about your species. Murderous barbarians, for the most part.

Susans my friend, said Gillian. But shes not like me. Youre not like me. If you dont help us, there wont be anyone like me left. No one like John or Zack or Malcolm.

I foresaw several futures branching from this point. In most of them, I wasnt alive.

She doesnt mean it, said Zack.

Thats all you know, Flash, said Gillian.

This is most irregular, most irritating, said Grandfather.

Kill it, ordered Gillian. End the Cold Knight.

I doubt if I can do that. You cant ask me to choose between the survival of two vastly different but essentially equivalent terrestrial species. Threatening murder is hardly likely to persuade me that the

human race is the worthier contestant.

Then put it to sleep then, turn it off.

Grandfather thought hard.

Gillian kinked my neck, stretching.

No, said Grandfather, at last. Mustnt meddle.

The shutters had come down in his mind. I could follow his thought processes. I was the only person in the universe to whom he had anything like an attachment (a human attachment!), but the law against meddling took precedence, overriding his feelings.

His (our?) conditioning was so extreme that the crime, even the contemplation of the crime, invoked its own punishment creating the fog-patches, blotting memories, shutting down whole aspects of personality.

Ive always feared Home. Now, at the point of death, I had learned to hate Home. Not for what would happen to me, or even the Earth, but for what had been done to Grandfather.

Arent you even sorry? asked Gillian. If not about us, about Susan?

It doesnt work like that. You wouldnt understand.

Gillian let go of my head.

Im glad I dont understand, she said. Youre a monster. Youre worse than the fanatics who wanted to sacrifice Malcolm. Youre worse than … than my old man.

Youd let your own granddaughter die rather than throw a switch. Youre worse than anyone in history ever. Dont you have feelings at all?

Gillian was crying. My neck still hurt, but I tried to comfort her.

For the first time, Grandfather was bewildered.

Certainties in his mind were breaking down.

I knew he does have feelings. If I have them and I certainly do, to the point of being driven mad by the irreconcilable emotions swarming through me every minute of the day then so does he. We arent

human, but we are people.

You broke all the other rules, Grandfather, I said. And you were right to break them. Break this last one. Nothing stays as it is forever, except at Home and thats not really a part of this universe. The Earth has changed since the Great Ice Age.

Its not suited to the Cold. Itd be happier somewhere else, with a more congenial climate. There are colder planets.

Grandfather thought a while, then said, Pluto.

Theres ice on Pluto, said John.

Not much else, my boy. And Nitrogen ice too. Next to that, hydrogen ice is just pretending to be cold. If you helped the Cold emigrate to Pluto, I said, everyone would be happy. It wouldnt be natural, though. Wed be meddling. Have you never wanted to meddle? We watch so many things. We could change them, you know. For the better. And once we started down that road, where d you think wed end up?

A part of things, not apart from them.

Indeed. Dreadful state of affairs,

hmm?

Mister, said Malcolm, Please …

Grandfather noticed the boy. Malcolm

held out Cowboy Gonk.

Please make the snowmen go away. You can have my gonk. Its my

favourite one.

Grandfather solemnly took it, and considered the stuffed toy.

His name is Cowboy Gonk, said Malcolm.

Does this represent an actual earthly lifeform? asked Grandfather. Arms stick out where the ears should be. Where would a digestive system be located in this giant skull, do you think? The legs wouldnt support the weight of the head. No, its most impractical. Itd never survive.

Its a toy, Grandfather, I said. Its not supposed to be practical.

The gonk

struck him very strangely.

More than Gillians threat to me, the gonk got through to him.

Its a feat of the imagination, he said. Unusual.

Unique, I

insisted. To them, humanity.

He smiled, showing his crooked teeth. Inside his mind, a wall collapsed.

Itd be a pity to lose this quality. A great pity. The universe would be a drabber,

duller place without it. At the very least, the human race deserves further study. I

shall see what I can do about the Cold.

Later

Ahem, there seems to be a problem, said Grandfather.

He had been in

communication with the whispering ice.

The Cold is very grateful for our

suggestions and much appreciates the

offer of alternative accommodation, but on the whole would rather continue with its original intention …

Wiping out the human race?

Yes,

child. Most regrettable.

Grandfather gave a well-I-did-my-best shrug, and rearranged some levers.

So, reverse the polarity, or whatever it is you need to do, said John. Make the Cold Knights do what you want.

John Brent, isnt it? said Grandfather, peering at the boy.

That might be a name to be reckoned with. In some futures.

Yes. Im John Brent.

And youre at school with Susan. Interesting. Knowing your mental inclinations, you should be able to understand that the course of action youre proposing is not quite as simple as one might hope.

Susan said you could see off the Cold.

Grandfather looked at me, trying not to seem pleased.

Did she now? The child has a great deal of faith in her aged relative, it would appear. It wouldnt do to let her down.

All the while, hed been playing with the keyboard of his machine, pretending to be casually fiddling but actually making crucial adjustments.

Now, he said, loudly, addressing the Cold. I think you should concentrate. There was a cracking in the ice, a grumbling inside. Grandfather put on a pair of tinted spectacles, and made adjustments to the multiple lenses. Is that load of old rubbish wired together

supposed to save us all? asked Gillian, incredulous.

Load of old rubbish? Indeed! What do you take me for, a rag and bone man? This is a highly sophisticated instrument. But its just a machine. It only functions on this plane. It can perform certain preordained tasks. Thats about it. But, and this is highly significant John, pay attention, you should learn something of interest to you this machine doesnt have to exist only on this plane. It has multidimensional mass. What do you think of that, then?

He held the lapel of his frock coat and made a sign for applause. None came.

Dont you see? By stretching into other planes, we can, as it were, enfold the Cold.

A classic stratagem, from the repertoire of the Great Khan. Of course, he was a proponent of encirclement, a two-dimensional tactic. What we intend might more accurately be called enspherement.

By using certain elements from my space-time machine, I can grasp the animus of the Cold inside a few seconds. But theres something I need to complete the device.

What? I asked.

Your friend, who so kindly offered his gonk. Malcolm, come here, would you?

He smiled alarmingly. Malcolm hesitated. I realise Grandfather can be quite frightening if he doesnt work against it. Malcolm decided and walked over to join Grandfather.

Hold these, please.

Grandfather gave Malcolm what seemed like a pair of metal skipping-rope handles attached to cables that wound into the machine.

Now, Malcolm … make a wish.

Malcolm closed his eyes.

There was a quiet moment, when the storm outside seemed to fade.

Motive power has to come from somewhere, Grandfather lectured. In this instance, our young friend Malcolm. I shouldnt be surprised if he were born with a caul. He has a capacity most of you people lose as

you grow up. With these spectacles, I can see the last of it vaguely shimmering around John, Gillian and Zack. But its a shining bubble around Malcolm. Its focus isnt his brain, but his heart. Susan, there are advantages to having only one heart. A reason we are discouraged from having feelings is that the ancients were correct to locate the emotion in the heart. You have already found out how troublesome it can be to have two or more feelings jostling for attention inside your ribcage. Energy is dissipated. What we are attempting here is a feat of concentration.

A great chord tooted out of the organ-pipes.

Malcolm opened his eyes and put the handles down. Is it done? he asked.

Grandfather patted his head and looked to us for approval.

Then the cataclysm started.

All the ice in Foremans Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us. I covered my head with my arms.

Keep wishing, Grandfather ordered, thrusting the handles back at Malcolm.

The murderous hail vanished, reconstituted as ice. Then the explosion came again. And was taken back, and came again.

As Grandfather had said, the Cold was trapped inside seconds. A time-snatch playing over and over. On the fifth or sixth replay, hail-claws scratched me.

The Cold was resisting Grandfathers enspherement.

You three, human children, come here, ordered Grandfather. Who knows how to play the organ?

John and Gillian looked aghast at each other.

All the ice in Foremans Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us. I covered my head with my arms.

I was in a skiffle band once, said Zack.

Capital, capital. Take the higher registers. Thats this keyboard here. Set up a roundelay effect, something like Ravels Bolero …

Dont know that number.

Maurice Ravel was a French composer, put in John, annoyed. The Bolero is his most famous work.

Can you play it on the joanna?

John shook his head.

Then the set-list is up to me, Mars-man.

All the ice in Foremans Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us.

I felt the beginnings of a fatal flaying, but they were taken back.

Stop bickering, said Grandfather. Anything simple and repetitive will do, Zack.

Zack edged Malcolm to one side, and began to lay down a bass line.

Now, you two, lets see what you can do.

Grandfather took John and Gillians hands and wrapped them around Malcolms knotted little fists.

Think of warm summer days, he told them. Tropical beaches, heat-strokes, burning buildings, the surface of Mercury, the heart of the sun. Dont just think, imagine!

Youve not lost your shining yet, though its in a sorry state.

All the ice in Foremans Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us.

It was as if Id been shot through with cold shrapnel. Then, it wasnt.

I could see what the spectacles helped Grandfather see in Malcolm, a kind of golden glow inside his chest, pulsing out through his whole body, lighting up the inside of his skin, pouring through his eyes, nostrils and mouth. John and Gillian, to a lesser extent, were the same.

The machine was shaking and tooting through its steam-whistle.

Zack, transported by his simple bass line, began to throw in improvised flourishes.

Susan, I want you to do something very important, said Grandfather. He was tugging at switches and levers. Both my hands are busy.

Yes, Grandfather.

Put some tea on would you, my dear.

All the ice in Foremans Yard exploded …

And folded in on itself, funnelling into a glittering spiral, like a huge seashell, then coiled and dwindled, sucking droplets from everywhere. Frozen speckles of blood and dirt flew off my face and hands. It felt like a severe eyebrow-plucking over every square inch of exposed skin.

Something inside the contraption burned out. Golden fire-arcs leaped between the pipes. The eyes of the cherubs blazed, and trickled liquid metal.

All the ice …

… crackled, fighting Grandfathers machine, but the pull was irresistible. Cold Knights stumped to the gateway of the Yard, then shivered into inanimate snowflakes.

The snow tornado funnelled down into something the size of an ice-cream cone, sucking in more and more of swirling ice-chips.

The sun broke through the clouds.

It was only late afternoon.

The machine collapsed with a burst of turquoise energy. Zack, quiff straightened into a Bride of Frankenstein frizzy perm, was hurled away from the keyboard. John, Gillian and Malcolm huddled low, to avoid flying bits of mechanism.

Grandfather stood in the middle of it all, pleased.

Later

Water dripped around the junkyard. A thaw was beginning.

There, said Grandfather, holding up a diamond-shaped lump of ice. The Cold is in here. It has withdrawn its animus. It was stretching itself, trying to inhabit all the ice in the world straight away. In a month or so, perhaps … but it was impatient. The whole of its

Intelligence is here. Pretty thing, isnt it?

And now youll make a rocketship? asked John. To send it to Pluto?

What? Um, no, of course not. What ever made you think that? Ill just pop inside for a moment. I shall be back directly.

He stepped into the Box.

I still dont think calling the coppers will help, said Zack.

The Box shifted. It dematerialised then materialised again, seeming to waver but not disappear. In between, Grandfather went to Pluto in the Far Future. He claimed an uneventful trip, but I later checked the log and saw he needed five goes to get there, hopping around the solar system and the centuries, and more than a dozen shots to get back to Foremans Yard an instant after departure.

Grandfather popped out.

What was that noise? asked John.

Too complicated to explain, boy. The Cold is on Pluto. I think it has seen reason, and will thrive in the new environment. It has no major competitors there. Your species can get on with what it does best, making a racket and squabbling.

And releasing beat records and painting sunsets and making gonks.

He was caught up sharp.

Yes, Susan, indeed. I feel a strange, I dont know how youd put it, satisfaction.

Why didnt I ever think before of this meddling? Perhaps for the first time, I feel free of them. Quite a case can be made for it. I should experiment further along these lines. A great many matters throughout space and time might benefit from a little discreet shove in the right direction. The Dark Ages, for instance …

Grandfather, I scolded.

Too much, you think, Susan? Youre probably right.

Tuesday, April 3rd, 1963

No school today. Or the rest of the week. And then its the holidays. But after Easter, itll be back to normal.

Its still cold, but sunny.

I tested a couple of snowmen. Theyre empty of intelligence.

The electricity is back on, and the gas and water and the BBC. A lot of people died in the cold snap, but no one is mentioning the Cold Knights. Grandfather and I arent the only people on the planet who remember selectively.

Grandfather, at least, is remembering a lot.

By breaking the rule of non-interference, he seems to have dispelled his own fog-patches. Im frustrated that it doesnt work that way for me.

I dont think I ever believed in the rule.

It was just something written into my brain with all the other stuff Ive spent my time on Earth discarding. Grandfather stayed in the Box, but, despite qualms, he let me go to School. He must have had a reason for that.

I think he was using me to test the human race, sending me out among them to make a decision for him, to think through a problem he was too old to tackle by himself. If so, it was a close thing.

Theres Gillian and John and Zack and Malcolm. There was Johns Dad giving up his life for a girl he probably wouldnt have liked if hed thought about it. There was Dolly, feeling responsible for a little boy because he wandered into a café on her shift. There was Malcolm offering up his most treasured possession for a cause he didnt understand. And theres Love Me Do, Albert Finney with an air-rifle, The Magic Flute, Lyons Maid ice cream, St Pancras Station, Hancocks Half-Hour.

But theres F.M. and Mr Carker and the Haighs. And thats not counting Nazis and atomic missiles and Double Geography. I could have gone the other way. If Gillian hadnt talked to me on my first day at Coal Hill School, I might have been with Grandfather, standing back and letting the Cold Knights retake the planet and good riddance to bad rubbish.

Wednesday, April 4th, 1963

I met John at the Lyons Comer House not the Wimpy Bar and we had tea and cake.

Very grown-up.

The Cold may be banished to Pluto, but things were broken during its attempt to regain mastery of the planet that will never be fixed. In the end, it was a matter of throwing a few switches on Grandfathers machine and the Cold Knights melted away, but I still dont feel as if we won anything. Johns father and Mr Okehurst and many others are still dead, and people like Mr Carker and the Haighs are still alive, still insisting that they were doing the right thing.

Deep down, John would rather Grandfather had killed the Cold, as it killed his father and so many others. Its emigration to Pluto might have been a neat solution, avoiding genocide, but it didnt satisfy his human need for … justice? Revenge? Not admirable, I know. But I feel its appeal.

Grandfather was tinkering with a machine, seeing a problem and finding a solution. I wasnt. I saw people hurt and killed for no reason except that they were in the way.

Grandfather says loftily that the Cold had no grudge, no capacity for cruelty. It was ridding its home of humans in the way a person might clean algae out of a fishtank or take medicine to purge a germ colony. But thats not how it felt in the School playground, out on the streets, in the Wimpy Bar, at the railway station. The cold Knights seemed to enjoy their mission: setting traps, springing surprises, making a game of it.

If Im pleased that Grandfather didnt kill the Cold, its because I wouldnt want him to live with the guilt I know hed feel at the extermination of an intelligent lifeform. I certainly dont want to go to Pluto to visit, to see how the Cold fellow is getting on in its new home.

The big thing is that I dont have a secret any more.

My friends know Im not from this planet.

The only one who treats me as he always did is Malcolm, and I didnt really have a secret from him. I dont look after him on Saturday afternoons any more. His Auntie Junie has come to live with them, and so my weekend job has disappeared I miss it, and not just for the five shillings. I still see Malcolm around the High Street quite often, with his Mum or Auntie Junie. He always has a big smile and a bigger hug for me. He has a new gonk now, Spaceman Gonk, but Cowboy Gonk is still his favourite, even with the woolstitch scar over its eye. His Mum disapproves when he makes up

stories about me, but it doesnt upset me. His wild tales might be true, for all I know maybe hes wound up with the memories sponged out of my mind. But I have to be careful with him.

Older children, even as old as Zack, know to keep quiet about us. But the little ones are different. They dont know not to tell grown-ups. Now hes gone against the meddling rule, Grandfather is a little bit paranoid about grown-ups finding out were not human. He says the Truant Officer will have agents on our case, alert for the slimmest rumour. He is especially wary of the teachers at Coal Hill, because he has this strange idea that educators are the sharpest, most dangerous intellects on the planet. I mentioned that he has never been to a parents evening, didnt I?

I dont see Gillian.

John says Gillian likes Zack now. Its because he has a motorbike. John says he doesnt mind, but he does.

He used to like me, until he found out I had two hearts.

(The Box is better than any bike, even a Norton but thats not a topic likely to come up.)

Its not that John doesnt like me now, its that he knows too much about me.

Nobody fancies the Mekon. Not even a Martian.

When it was cold, John said things I wish would vanish into my fog but which stubbornly remain lodged in memory. I understand the shock he was suffering from after his fathers death, but that he could think even for a minute that I was responsible for it all makes things awkward between us. Its strange Gillian came close to murdering me, but I was more hurt when John called me a spy.

Next year, when shes sixteen, Gillian plans on leaving home and getting engaged to Zack. She wants to leave School too and get a job in a shop. Zack might secretly be an Enid Blyton-reading softie, but is still officially a Ton-Up Boy and can take care of himself. The new white lightning-strike in his hair is an intimidating touch. I think he has made Gillians Dad think twice about belting her.

Gillian couldnt kill me, even to save the world. That means her old man hasnt taught her to be like him. I hope she and Zack can be happy, but I know theyll steer clear of me in the future.

Theyre growing up and want to pretend some things never happened. I just remind them, every time they look at me, that the universe isnt what you see on telly or read in the papers. To get on, they have to believe that it is, or theyll be as outcast here, where they have to live, as Grandfather was back Home.

John isnt like that. Hes full of questions about us, but the answers still arent all there in my head.

I cant name the planet I come from, if it actually is a planet it might just be a plane. I dont know my Grandfathers name. And Susan Foreman is an alias, at least the Foreman part which was written up on the gates of the scrap merchants yard when the Box arrived.

As for the Box, I can explain the Physics, but not in any way John would understand, even if he goes to Cambridge and wins the Nobel Prize. Which, a little bird tells me, is quite likely.

The most upsetting thing is that John is afraid of me. As if I might shoot death-rays out of my eyes. Im not sure that I cant do that. Or wont be able to when I grow up. Im leaving Coal Hill, said John. To live with Mum in Northumberland. After what happened with Dad, I wont have to do

R.O.T.C. any more. Do you have parents? I dont know. Do you just grow in bottles, or something? Like in Brave New World? I dont know. Its weird, Susan. I shrugged. I mean, even for an … well, for what you are … youre weird. Unearthly? He looked away.

Will you stay here? he asked.

For a while. Its up to Grandfather. And the Box. Its not very well at the moment.

What Grandfather did with the Cold Knights wasnt as easy as he might

have made it seem. He had to ignore safety procedures.

I still dont understand how the Box can be a spaceship.

Its not. It travels

through time and relative dimensions.

In space?

Well, yes.

So you can go

anywhere at any time?

Ordinarily. A filament burned out. A replacement isnt going to be easy to find. Were not stranded or anything. But we are limited. And your people will be searching for you now? Grandfather is afraid so. I thought once I could picture the Truant Officers face, but its fading.

I have an image of a smile, smug and nasty and clever. Ghastly Granges sneer, on the face of a blurred Satan. Youre criminals?

More like political exiles. Though that doesnt mean they wouldnt haul us back and put Grandfather on trial. Especially now. What he did, going to Pluto and all, will have set alarm bells ringing at Home. Theyll know. If you interfere with history, it jangles the web. The officer on our case will be more determined than ever. They can take away our memories. Not just from our heads, but from yours. From everybodys. I think theyve done that before. Of course, no one would remember.

They sound awful.

Not really. Just old … set in their ways.

Not with-it?

Not at all.

John looked at his wristwatch. Ive got to go. Im meeting Mum at the

station.

We said goodbye. John left.

Later

Back in the Box, with Grandfather.

Hes annoyed. On his trip to Pluto, he broke something serious. Grandfather hasnt tested it yet, but he believes the Box wont follow a course set for it.

It will go where it wishes, at random, whimsically, he said, grumpy.

I think the rule in Grandfathers head is broken. He wont follow any course set for him either.

Typical, I said.

Nonsense, Susan. Ill have it fixed in no time.

AFTERWORD

Elemental, My Dear Susan

Despite being set before Who-proper even started, there is never any doubt that what you have just enjoyed is a Doctor Who story. There is something unique about them

something which makes Doctor Who a sub-genre in its own right. Something that, like the Cold itself, almost defies analysis. Only in Doctor Who can walking snowmen be at once absurd and frightening. Only in Doctor Who is school detention as chilling as the advancing alien menace. Only in Doctor Who can your school friends grandfather live in a police box inside a junk yard. The way the images and the imagination are layered is unique.

Time and Relative, like the series it prequels, works on many levels. It gives us something new, something informed with a modern perspective. But it is told from a viewpoint that captures and enhances the child-like, adolescent sense of awe with which many of us were introduced to the Doctor and his adventures. Like Susan, we know more than the other characters. But we are also caught up in the excitement, the tension, the fear and the wonder of it all. Its a Journey of discovery for us all.

Although the Doctor himself is scarcely featured, his presence is felt throughout. He is always there, always in control, always casting a shadow across the ice-white pages. In this sense, as in many others, Time and Relative is reminiscent of those early Who adventures.

Here too is the Doctor himself of those very first, uncertain times. He is a background figure an enigma even to Susan. His motives are dubious, his actions and affiliations unpredictable, lost in the swirling fog. But in this story we get the sense that for the first time he is assuming the mantle of Humanitys Champion of the elemental force that he will become. That the fog is starting to clear a little and afford him glimpses of what he should be.

Within the context of the Universe, like Susan within the context of Coal Hill School, the Doctor is essentially a loner. He walks forever in eternity and he walks alone, lost in his own wanderlust and rocked between boundless enthusiasm and numbing ennui. Companions may come and go, but he is never close to any of them. He never talks of his inner turmoil in detail; he never unburdens himself emotionally; he never opens up whatsoever.

The only real feeling the Doctor demonstrates at all is his utter abhorrence of evil.

Yet even this and his contention that life is sacred is secondary when the need arises and circumstances conspire to make it so secondary to some higher calling which is never spelled out, a Greater Good that remains unarticulated and perhaps inarticulatable. A calling that in Kims story he has yet to come to terms with.

At his most successful times, and here at the start of his adventures, the Doctor is a mystery. We know next to nothing of his feelings and motivations. We discover we know less than we thought about his origins and background. We find that even our trust is not immutable.

But over the years the Doctors background and his soul have been laid bare. He has become metaphorically as well as narratively more human. And as he becomes better defined, more accessible, so he loses his mystique and appeal. The Doctor of today is in danger of becoming merely a hero like any other. By returning to the roots of Doctor Who, Kim is able to recapture so much that we have subsequently lost. Time and Relative is a startling demonstration that less is more.

There is something elemental about the Doctor. Especially presented as he is here, the Doctor becomes a force rather than a personality. It is not by accident that Kims villain is also an elemental force the most appropriate of opponents.

It is unfair to describe any Doctor Who story as an archetype. But Kim has given us something that touches on so many of the nerves of Doctor Who, yet which offers us so much that is new. It is deep and thematic, enthusiastic, well-written and expertly-presented. Yet at the same time the story drives it onwards, the excitement pulls us in, the fear makes us shiver with cold realisation.

Because that is what the Doctor Who format is really about, what makes it so successful on so many levels for so many people. It is about telling the most exciting and interesting stories in the best possible way. It is a cause for celebration that this format is inexhaustible. It is heartening that so many of us appreciate being drawn into the endless worlds that it opens up. And it is a testament to the power of that format that it is strong enough to appeal to writers of the calibre and talent of Kim Newman.

Justin Richards BBC Books Doctor Who Range Consultant August 2001

About The Author

Kim Newman is an author, film expert and critic, an enthusiastic pundit of SF writing and one of Britains great eccentrics. Born in Brixton in 1959, he grew up in Somerset and graduated in English at Sussex University. He came to London in 1980 and worked with a Bridgwater Arts and Entertainment Collective called Sheep Worrying as a Kazoo player and cabaret performer.

Kim has published several highly successful novels with Simon and Schuster: The Night Mayor, Bad Dreams, Jago, The Quorum, Lifes Lottery and his earlier reworkings of the Dracula mythology Anno Dracula, The Bloody Red Baron and Dracula, cha, cha, cha, plus four collections of short stories: Famous Monsters, The Original Doctor Shade, Seven Stars and Unforgivable Stories. He has also published a collection of his Where the Bodies are Buried… stories in one volume and is a regular contributor to several anthology series. He is the author of several specialist film books and is a regular film reviewer for Empire and Sight and Sound magazines.

Anno Dracula won the Children Of The Night Award for Best Novel from the Dracula Society and the Best Novel Award from the Lord Ruthven Assembly. It was also shortlisted for the Bram Stoker Award and the World Fantasy Award. The Where the Bodies are Buried book won the British Fantasy Award for Best Collection. The Quorum, Dr Shade and Anno Dracula have all been optioned for movies.